

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1922.—VOL. LXXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 8, 1900.

[PRICE ONE PENCE.]



AS ADA NEARED THE BOTTOM OF THE CLIFF, HER FOOT SLIPPED, AND SHE FELL.

JOHN REEVE'S INHERITANCE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"I DON'T care if you do leave your money from me," said Ada Andell, defiantly. "I am quite tired of hearing your threats to turn me out of the house every moment of the day. Do you think because I am dependent upon you I ought to be your slave?"

The girl was white with passion, and absolutely hoarse with rage; her eyes flashed, her hands trembled, and she actually panted for breath. Mrs. Sergeant was about to speak, but before she could do so the girl went on.

"What has my life been the last five years? Answer me that. Deprived of all the enjoyments that a girl of my age usually has, treated in a

way which you would not think of behaving to your servants, you have managed to make my existence a very miserable one. Can you say that I haven't been patient with you until now, although you have said things that have wounded me dreadfully—more than you can think! It was very wrong of you to bring me up in the expectation of never having to earn my living, and now, when you know I am perfectly helpless, to make use of cruel threats."

"Are you mad, girl? I have never seen you conduct yourself in this manner before," stammered Mrs. Sergeant. "You look absolutely frightful; your face is livid with rage!"

"You have driven me to the verge of madness several times," said Ada, bitterly. "Often the food I have taken at your table has almost choked me. Even the servants remark your treatment of me, and wonder that I submit to such degradation."

"I did expect a little gratitude," said Mrs. Sergeant, looking very much ill-used. "What would have become of you but for me?"

"As to that I neither know nor care," said Ada, desperately.

"You wicked, ungrateful girl," said Mrs. Sergeant, laying down her needlework, and trying to put on a martyr-like expression, which did not suit her unpleasant face, for there was ill-nature in every feature. Glancing at her as she sat in her large arm-chair Ada could not help wondering if she had ever been young, or any way different to what she now was.

"Because I don't tell you that I am grateful every time the clock strikes the hour you think I am wholly indifferent to what you have done for me," replied Ada. "There is no reason why a grateful person should be eternally sounding the praises of her benefactor. It is not in my nature to be perpetually saying and doing the same thing from morning till night, and I am sure if I did you would think even less of me than you do now."

"If I were in your place I should behave in quite a different manner altogether," said Mrs. Sergeant, sitting bolt upright in her chair, and

putting on her spectacles in order to see the rebel more clearly. "I should never forget for a single moment to appreciate the kindness showered upon me, and I should show my gratitude in a thousand different ways. I should never be able to express in adequate words my obligations to one who had befriended me."

"I am afraid you would soon grow weary," said Ada Ainsell. "I don't really think you know how trying and worrying you are."

"After this," exclaimed Mrs. Sargeant for about the thousandth time, "after this you shall never inherit one farthing of my money, and when you have to get your living all amongst strangers, you will find how different you will be treated, and then you will bitterly regret your selfishness to me. Perhaps then your haughty spirit will be crushed, and you will come crawling to me on your bended knees to ask the forgiveness I may not then think fit to grant."

"I really believe if you were not quite so rich you would be more merciful," observed Ada. "Money seems to have the effect of souring some people."

"You shall have very little money," said Mrs. Sargeant; "and it would serve you right if you came to begging in the street for your bread. I will leave all my money to the Rev. George Bendle in trust, to build two or three chapels!"

"He is the Rev. George Bendle!" cried Ada, who had just glanced out of the window. "There is something so sleek and oily about the man that I quite dislike him."

"Of course you are quite unable to appreciate such a man as the Rev. George Bendle," sighed Mrs. Sargeant. "You are depraved—thoroughly depraved!"

Ada gave a scornful smile, and, seating herself in a chair near the window, took up her needle-work, fully resolved not to say another word. The girl had a proud and sensitive nature, and all the little slights that were put upon her, all the sneers and spiteful remarks she had to bear, penetrated to her heart. She had been so submissive, and had never before resented anything that had been said; but of late her life had been quite intolerable. However, now that her temper had somewhat subsided, she half regretted having spoken. From white she had turned to red, and her face had a very becoming flush upon it when the Rev. George Bendle entered the room. He was a constant visitor to the Hall, and a very welcome one, too, to Ada.

"I am so pleased to see you Mr. Bendle," said Mrs. Sargeant, graciously enough. "It is very kind of you indeed to give me a call!"

"Is she glad? Is Miss Ada glad to see me?" whispered the Rev. Bendle, in such tones, however, that the girl heard him distinctly, although she pretended not to do so.

"I am afraid not," replied Mrs. Sargeant, shaking her head from side to side. "The fact of the matter is that she is in one of her wicked tempers, and if you had come in a few moments ago you would have heard her screaming at the top of her voice. You have only to look at her flushed face to see the rage she has been in."

The Rev. George Bendle gave a sly look at the girl, and it must be confessed that there was great admiration in his eyes, sooner as she was.

He was sorry that she was such a wicked little thing; but he could not help thinking, good man as he was, that her temper heightened her beauty.

Never before had her eyes looked so bright, or her cheeks such a lovely colour, and it must be confessed that his heart beat just a little faster as he gazed upon her.

It had occurred to him of late that it would not be half a bad thing if he could make Ada his wife, for no doubt Mrs. Sargeant would leave the girl her money. Although he had often heard Mrs. Sargeant declare that she would not give the girl a penny, he came to the conclusion that she would not keep her word.

At all events, he would be in a much more secure position if he could make Ada his bride, for if the money did not go to the chapel it might come to the girl.

"I am really greatly concerned about Miss Ada, Mrs. Sargeant," observed the Rev. Bendle, in his

only, subdued voice. "Unfortunately she has a fierce, rebellious spirit, which can bring nothing but misery upon her. Only the other day, when I expostulated with her, and took her hand in mine kindly, she pushed me roughly away, and glances at me derisively."

It may here be observed that the Rev. George Bendle had taken her hand caressingly, as a lover would do, and the girl had resented it, for she had the greatest dislike and distrust for the gentleman who hoped to make her his wife.

"Speak to her now," said Mrs. Sargeant, who had the utmost confidence in the Rev. George Bendle's power of persuasion. "You may succeed where I have failed."

"I will do my best—rest assured I will do my best!" murmured the reverend gentleman, advancing to the window where Ada was sitting. There was a vacant chair close to her, and he took possession of it.

The girl, who had heard every word of the conversation, was very busy at her work, and seemed quite unconscious of his presence.

Quite annoyed at this indifference, the gentleman gave a nervous little cough, and seeing that it did not have the desired effect of attracting her attention he bent forward and touched her hand.

Ada recollects just as though a snake had come in contact with her flesh. He knew how very loathsome he was to the girl, but still he was a patient, forgiving man, and did not resent her treatment of him. It would be wrong—very wrong—if he had done that. By kindness he would attempt to melt her obdurate heart.

"Why do you frown? Why are you angry?" he asked, putting his mouth near to her ear. "Why will you quarrel with Mrs. Sargeant, that kindest and best of women? Cannot you drive the demon from your heart? Let me assist you to do so."

"Mr. Bendle, this is an unwarrantable interference with my private affairs, and I beg that you will cease this impertinence!" cried Ada.

"It is my duty to try and reform those who have not the spirit of goodness within," observed the Rev. George Bendle. "You want somebody to guide you, wilful girl as you are; and I am asked to be your instructor."

Once more he attempted to take the girl's hand, and again she took it away; but the Rev. George Bendle was not the man to submit to any kind of check.

It seemed to him that, to a certain extent, the girl was in his power, for he had such an influence over Mrs. Sargeant that, if she refused to marry him, he could have the money willed away from her.

"I will not listen to another word!" cried Ada, pushing by the Rev. George Bendle, who tried to detain her. In another instant she had quitted the room, greatly to his astonishment.

"You see what little influence I have over her," observed the Rev. George Bendle, immediately after the door was shut; "but I will not allow myself to be discouraged. Possibly I may be able to soften her heart in time."

Ada felt that she could not remain in the house a moment longer; for she felt that Mr. Bendle had begun a regular system of annoyance, and she feared that her aunt would give him every encouragement.

She seemed to be in such a helpless position, this lonely girl, with no friend in all the great wide world to advise her.

She hurried along the cliffs very quickly, for the girl was young, strong, and active of limb; and many people turned round to look at her in wonder, to see a lady walking so fast.

If she was not unconscious of their remarks she was quite indifferent to them in her present mood, for her temper was thoroughly aroused.

It was a wild March day, and the cold east wind blew right in her face, and ruffled her soft fluffy hair. On she went, cooling gradually down, till at length she quite forgot all about the odious George Bendle.

A young girl of about her own age passed her by, who was leaning on the arm of a handsome young man, a head and shoulders taller than herself.

"She looks so happy," thought Ada, "that I wonder if that handsome-looking fellow is her sweetheart! I should not be at all surprised if it were so," and she had guessed the truth too.

At length she came to a little winding path that led down to the yellow sands. It was steep—dangerously steep in some places; but Ada was not a bit frightened, or did not feel giddy, although the cliff was of a dizzy height.

Being rather excited this afternoon, Ada was not so cautious as usual in her descent, and the result was that as she neared the bottom of the cliff her foot slipped, and she fell to the ground—some little distance.

For a moment or two she felt half stunned, the shock was so great; but when her head grew clearer she attempted to rise, only to shrink back with a pitiful little groan of pain. She found that she had sprained her ankle, and it hurt her intensely.

There she lay quite helplessly, her face drawn with anguish. The pain was so intense for some time that the danger of her position never entered her head.

She was bruised in several places, her hands and lips were cut, and there was a nasty mark on her face.

Bruised and helpless she lay there, like some beautiful flower. Compared with the sprained ankle, her other injuries were as nothing.

The tide was coming in. At high tide it reached the foot of the cliff, so altogether the young girl was in a very unenviable position; for it seemed, when suddenly aroused to her danger by the sound of the incoming waves, that she was doomed to die.

Again and again she cried out, but there was no response, only now and then the piercing shriek of some sea bird to mock her, as it were.

Hoarse with shouting, quite cut of breath, and numb with the cold, aching in every limb, Ada lay there, vaguely wondering if Mrs. Sargeant would be even sorry when she heard the news. Probably she would be a little regretful, for the girl had been very useful to her in more ways than one.

A great curlew flew over her head with its wild cry, and the waves fretted against the rocks. How strangely wild and awesome!

On came the waves, rolling and tumbling over each other, as though in mad delight at the prospect of another victim.

They came nearer and nearer, and the fear of death overcoming her sense of pain, she began to crawl on her hands and knees. In all probability she would have got out of danger had she not fainted away. With one last moan of anguish the girl swooned away, and then was mercifully unconscious of pain and peril.

CHAPTER II.

A BOAT came round the point a few minutes after, the rower being a fine, supple man of about two-and-twenty.

He was a powerful man, and knew how to row well and gracefully—his sweeping curves of the oars would have attracted the attention of a professional oarsman. His face was dark and spirited, and he had a firm mouth, resolute enough for anything.

There was one passenger besides himself, a large, white-eyed, black dog, that was reclining lazily on his master's coat. The dog had a look of extreme enjoyment in his sleepy face, and every now and then would wag his tail.

"You lazy, good-for-nothing old Carlo!" cried the young man, resting on his oars. "I dare say it is very pleasant for you to look on at me working, but I don't half like it! We shall have a storm presently, if I am not mistaken."

He looked up at the sky as he spoke and shook his head; then his eyes wandered to the shore. Something dark was lying on the sand. At first the young man thought that it was a mass of seaweed clustered together, but another glance satisfied him that it was a human form.

His eyes rested on the dark figure, and he gave a frown, and his lips curled, for he detested

March 3, 1900.

THE LONDON READER.

493

"that I
now is her
surprised it
with her,
ing path
was steep
but Ada
el giddy,

Ada wa
and the
a ground
stunned,
head gave
to shrink
in. She
and h
e draw
for some
a never
r hands
mark on
ke some
sprained
tide it
her the
sation;
to her
es, that

ers was
plancing
were,
breath,
y limb,
. San
ard the
grateful,
a more
with its
rocks.

og over
at the
fear of
began
ll pro
er had
on of
an was

utes about
to row
of the
a pro
litrated,
gh for

self, a
flung
a look
and
lo! "
"I
k on
We
mis
hook
hors.
first
ance
d be

drunkenness. No doubt it was some man who had been overcome with drink.

It is the enjoyment of some excursionists to go down to the seaside and get drunk.

John Reeve had never been under the influence of drink in his life, and he had the greatest horror of it. The man had evidently been overcome with something that was much stronger, but not quite so wholesome, as sea air, he thought.

He hated drunkenness with an impatient, unyielding hatred. He would get on as quickly as he could. The sky was growing darker, and there was something ominous in the air. It would be safe to get to the village as soon as he could.

The fishermen had warned him not to go for a row that day; and now he regretted not having taken their advice. Once more he began to row, but suddenly something occurred to him.

The tide was coming in. If it reached the foot of the cliff, the man would be drowned. It would be only humane to warn him of his danger. So, coming to this conclusion, he made for the shore. As he approached the yellow sand and the beetling cliffs he gave vent to an exclamation of the utmost surprise.

It was not a man, but a woman! Perhaps she was in a state of intoxication. He came still nearer, and saw the beautiful, white, upturned face, and knew that he had not judged rightly.

There was something in the white face that startled him.

While he was gazing at and studying the face in fear lest life should have departed, the eyes of the poor injured girl were opened.

She uttered a faint, entreating cry.

"Help! help! for the love of Heaven!"

"Hush! hush!" said John Reeve, in gentle accents. "You must not excite yourself. Nothing will harm you."

The girl glanced at him wildly.

"Help!" cried the girl once again in tones that pierced his heart; then, with a low whine, the dog began to lick her face, thinking, poor beast, to show his sympathy.

The girl was frightened of the great black dog in her half-dazed state.

"The dog will not hurt you, my poor child," said the young man, soothingly. He called her child, but he was not so much older than her for the matter of that. "One moment, if you please."

"Do not leave me!"

"Only for an instant, or the boat will drift away."

"Oh, yes, I understand!" said the girl, a light breaking in upon her.

He hurried back to the boat and made it fast, and then picked his way back over the rugged points.

"Heaven reward you!" uttered the feeble voice. "Can you find me help?"

"What has happened? Are you ill?" asked the young man, tenderly, as he bent over her.

"I cannot move hand or foot" replied the girl. "I am helpless."

Mechanically John looked at her wrists as if he expected to see them bound with strings, but there were no cords there.

"Are you ill?" he repeated. "Are you subject to fainting fits?"

"No; I fell from the cliff above—days ago it seems to me. I have fainted more than a dozen times. It seemed to me that I was to be drowned. I called and called, but no one came."

"You fell from the cliff?" said the young man in alarm. "How far?"

"Not very far."

"Do you think that you have broken any bones?" said her rescuer, anxiously.

"No, I think not. I have only sprained my ankle and bruised myself. It might have been worse!"

It seemed as though the girl had dropped off once more, for her delicate features settled into a strange calm, and there was nothing but the murmur of the sea.

He studied the girl for some moments as if fascinated by her beauty. Her helpless condition seemed to make her dear to his eyes, although he

had only seen her just a moment or two. Tall he could see, from the length of limb; a refined, handsome face, soft, wavy, light-brown hair, and a pretty dimpled chin.

The face appealed strongly to his pity, and he clasped the hands that were so soft, although sun-browned, and comely in shape—the hands of a lady.

"Can you tell me anything about yourself?" asked John Reeve, as he wiped her moist brow with his handkerchief. He spoke as tenderly and touched her as gently as though he had been a woman.

"Will you go for assistance?" said Ada, apparently not catching what he said. "How long will you be gone, and what time is it now?"

"Six o'clock," taking out his watch.

"I must have been here a very long time," observed Ada Ansdell. "I have tried to stand on my feet more than once, and then I attempted to crawl along the ground out of reach of the sea."

"You must have suffered dreadfully!" said the young man. "How far is it to the nearest village?"

"About a mile."

What was to be done? The young man glanced at the girl, quite uncertain what to do.

"Can't you take me away?" said Ada, piteously. "I am certain I must die if I stay here!"

"I must carry you to the boat."

We hear of the bravery of desperation. The young girl made an attempt to rise, and, with John Reeve's assistance, sat up. Ada's eyes asked for assistance so entreatingly that he stretched out both hands, and then she rose to a standing position.

"The way is very rough," he said, "and you are bruised and hurt."

Then he took her in his strong arms and carried her along. The way was rough as he had stated, and strong as he was he had some difficulty in carrying her. His feet sank into the yielding mud, and he made slow progress. The girl was strongly made, and not at all slight; she was quite as tall and not very much lighter than the young man, so he had not a very easy task.

It seemed to them both more than once that he must give up, but he was desperate. Ada was very much embarrassed at being carried in this way, and more than once she protested that she would walk, for she knew very well that she was no fairy.

He reached the boat, and deposited his beautiful burden in it. The young man eased her position as well as he could, and then he took the oars and rowed his best. Ada fainted away again, and the young man wondered indeed if she were alive or dead.

It seemed to him that hours elapsed before he reached the shore; and, in fact, he had great difficulty in landing, for the storm came on long before he reached his destination.

Two or three fishermen, who happened to be standing about, as they do in all weathers, rushed into the sea and dragged out the boat. Their astonishment was great when they saw the girl, who was still unconscious.

"Where did you find her?" asked one, while all the fishermen looked at her pityingly, for their hearts were quite touched.

Human nature is so consistent that a beautiful woman in pain will generally attract more pity than an ugly one; at all events, among strangers. One or two of the fishermen actually had tears in their eyes, when a moan came from her pale, quivering lips.

"She has fallen from the cliff," answered John Reeve.

"Poor lass, she is dying!" cried a stout woman with bare arms. "She will never recover the shock. I believe she is injured internally!"

"Don't tell such a lie, woman!" said the young man, so fiercely that the woman retreated from him in fear. "She is no more dying than you are!"

"I meant no offence!" stammered the woman, feeling sorry for the young stranger; "but

she does look so bad, and I really said what I thought!"

"You must not think such a thing. No one must think such a thing!" cried John, addressing those who surrounded him on all sides. "She will soon recover from the shock to the system, and be stronger than ever. Go for a doctor, will you? Do not stand gaping here like a lot of idiots. A sovereign for the first man who reaches a doctor!"

It was a race then, for a dozen sturdy fishermen hurried away, but they stood no chance against one slight active lad, who left them far behind.

The doctor was soon on the spot; and, in a few words, John Reeve related how the girl had come by the accident. Then he looked to the girl, and then a stretcher was improvised. John went home with his dog.

For a day or two John was very restless, for he could do nothing but think of the girl he had rescued. He often found himself repeating her name over and over again.

Some spell was over him, and he could not understand it at all. Something urged him to ascertain if he had been of any service or not. Perhaps his help had come too late. Probably he had saved her from drowning only to suffer a more painful death.

The thought of the probability of her dying made him shudder and turn white. So he went straight to the doctor.

"Well, she has been rather badly shaken up!" admitted Dr. Armstrong. "Shoulder dislocated, ankle sprained, bruised outwardly, and it remains to be seen how much she is damaged inwardly. It will be a touch-and-go affair, I fear. Do you know nothing about her friends?"

It is as well here to observe that John Reeve had brought Ada to a village where she was entirely unknown. At that moment she was lying at the doctor's house.

"Nothing at all!"

"I am sorry for that. They ought to be communicated with at once."

"Cannot she tell you anything about herself?" asked John, anxiously, for he was strangely interested in her—more interested than he had ever been before in any woman.

"She is quite light-headed," returned Dr. Armstrong; "and it would not be at all safe to question her. The only hope of saving her is to keep her perfectly quiet in a darkened room."

"But surely some of her clothing is marked with her name?" suggested John eagerly.

"There is only her Christian name to be found on them," said the doctor shaking his head.

"What is that?"

"Ada."

"Ada!" said John. "I will remember that name!"

"If you feel so greatly interested in this young lady you might search for her friends at the neighbouring seaside resorts," observed the doctor, seeing by the young man's manner that he was anxious over the affair. "Probably she is an excursionist, and, in that case, it will be difficult to find out her people."

"But surely when she is missing they will advertise for her!" said John.

"Nothing more likely!" returned the doctor. "Will you go and make inquiries at the other seaside towns?"

"I'll go this afternoon!" John Reeve declared, but he never kept that promise, although he meant to do so at the time.

On returning to his hotel he found a telegram awaiting him.

"I suppose it is from the office," he thought. "What a nuisance! I wish now that I had not given my address, and then I could not have been bothered in my holiday!"

He tore open the envelope, and his brown healthy face turned deadly pale.

"Why, what is the matter, sir?" said the landlord, in alarm.

The young man was too agitated to speak at that moment, so he handed him the telegram.

"Your father is dreadfully ill! Dying we think! Come at once!"

CHAPTER III.

On the same afternoon as that on which her rescuer received the startling telegram the girl somewhat recovered; so far, that she could explain who she was and where she resided. Mrs. Sergeant was sent for at once, and soon arrived at the doctor's house, accompanied by the Rev. George Bendle.

Mrs. Sergeant seemed to think that Ada had committed some great offence in having an accident. It was a bitter cold day, and it annoyed her to be taken away from her fireside. To tell the truth, she had missed Ada very much, for the servants would not put up with all the girl did. It was regarded by those in Mrs. Sergeant's neighbourhood as strange if a servant remained more than a month under the old lady's roof.

The doctor noticed that immediately Mrs. Sergeant and the Rev. George Bendle came on the scene the girl grew excited and flushed. He had warned Mrs. Sergeant to be very quiet on entering the sick-room, but she paid little attention to what he said.

"I declare, Ada, you have caused me great anxiety," observed Mrs. Sergeant, as she sat down on the bed, a proceeding that sent a shiver through the girl's sensitive frame. "I suppose you are aware that I risk getting my death by coming out to see you in this dreadful east wind?"

The only answer that came from Ada's throat, if answer it could be called, was a hollow moan of pain, which did not penetrate to the old woman's selfish heart. She did not express one word of pity for Ada; but her anxiety was aroused as to how the accident had occurred, and she ventured to ask for an explanation. Mrs. Sergeant had now had the effect of making Ada's head ache dreadfully, as she could have seen if she had had any feeling.

"I fell from the winding path on the cliff," replied Ada, thinking that she had done wrong in giving the doctor Mrs. Sergeant's address until she had grown stronger.

"You now see the pain and suffering you have brought upon yourself through your own folly," observed Mrs. Sergeant, making the bed creak with her weight, and setting Ada's teeth on edge, till she almost felt inclined to shriek. "If you had not left my house in one of your fits of ungovernable temper, and had kept to the Parade, as a young lady should, you would never have had this accident."

"It has been a judgment upon her," remarked the Rev. George Bendle, rubbing his oily hands together; "and I sincerely hope that she will take this lesson to heart, and derive benefit from it."

"I suppose she will be able to be removed to-day!" said Mrs. Sergeant, addressing the doctor.

"Mrs. Sergeant," said Dr. Armstrong, sternly, "you do not seem to realise that this young lady has not recovered from the shock! It would be an act of cruelty—gross cruelty—to remove her at present."

"I don't see how it could hurt. I have a carriage at the door," responded Mrs. Sergeant, giving the doctor a spiteful glance; but his clear, steady gaze confused her rather, and she turned her eyes away. "I'll ask the girl, and hear what she says. Don't you think you could manage to dress and come home—the coachman could carry you down to the carriage?"

The girl said timidly that she thought she could; but the doctor again interposed. He would not allow a patient of his to be treated in such a manner; and if Mrs. Sergeant took her away after his warning, she must be answerable for the after consequences.

The doctor spoke so decidedly, and so sternly, that the old lady was quite staggered, and agreed that the girl should remain where she was for the present.

Ada gave Dr. Armstrong a grateful look that did not escape the keen-eyed clergyman.

Mrs. Sergeant did not remain long with her adopted daughter, and when she went the girl gave a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"Of course I know your object in wishing to

keep the girl here," observed Mrs. Sergeant, as she and the doctor stood at the hall door.

"My motive!" said the startled doctor. "I do not understand you, madam."

"You wish to make as much profit out of your patient as you can, and that is why you will not allow her to be removed," cried the old lady, sweeping by him; and having given this parting shot, she stepped into the carriage and was driven away, with the sleek George Bendle sitting beside her.

It was three days after Mrs. Sergeant had paid her visit that Ada was able to get downstairs, but only with the assistance of the doctor's wife, a kindly, sympathetic little woman, who had taken a great liking to the invalid. She reclined on a sofa close to a window that overlooked the sea. She had been on the couch some hours when Dr. Armstrong's wife spoke of the young man who had saved her life.

The girl had longed to make inquiries about him, but had been too bashful to do so.

"It is very strange," said Mrs. Armstrong, as she wheeled up a little table close to the couch, on which the tea things were laid. She said these words more to herself than to Ada.

"What is very strange?" asked Ada.

"That the young gentleman who saved your life should not come to ask how you are!" replied the doctor's wife. "My husband tells me that he seemed very anxious about you, so much disturbed by your accident that we thought at first that he was your sweetheart. His disappearance is very extraordinary, to say the least of it."

"I suppose he was sorry for my accident!" said Ada, turning her face away from the light, which was perhaps too strong for her eyes. "I know I should pity anyone in the same position; but, depend upon it, he has forgotten me, by this time, having something better to think of."

Perhaps he might have forgotten her, but there was no oblivion for her, as Mrs. Armstrong might have seen if Ada's face had not been turned away. How could she forget the man who had rescued her, the man who had found her on the yellow sand quite as helpless as if she had been bound hand and foot with cruel thongs! It never occurred to the foolish little thing, in her deep and lasting gratitude, that he had risked nothing in taking her up in his arms and carrying her down to the boat; she only remembered one thing—that he had saved her life.

In her eyes he was a hero, and a very handsome one. Mrs. Armstrong believing that she had fallen asleep, said not a word more; but the girl was in deep reverie, wondering and wondering whether she should ever see him again. She would be quite satisfied, she told herself, if she could only see him once again, just to thank him for the service he had rendered her in her hour of need. He might at least have left his name, so that she could repeat it to herself odd times when she was more than usually lonely and depressed. Every time the little garden gate was opened she glanced out wistfully, hoping against hope that her preserver had returned, but he came not.

Gradually Ada grew stronger, and the day came when she was to return to the Hall. How she regretted the prospect of leaving her kind friends! She had been treated with such consideration during her stay at Rose Cottage, and it cannot surprise the reader that she was reluctant to leave it.

There were tears in her eyes when Mrs. Armstrong kissed her and said good-bye, and Mrs. Armstrong saw them there, and questioned their cause. What a dear, impulsive thing Ada was! Mrs. Armstrong put her arm round the girl's waist protectively as she observed,—

"Remember, my dear, if that horrid Mrs. Sergeant is unkind to you, you can always come to us."

Then the carriage rolled away with its unhappy burden. More than once Ada looked back, and there was the doctor's wife standing at the little green gate, waving her hand encouragingly; but a bend in the lane soon hid her from view, and then Ada felt dreadfully lonely.

She found Mrs. Sergeant in one of her most

disagreeable moods when she reached the Hall. She had given all the old servants notice to quit that day, and the consequence was they would hardly do anything. The old lady was full of a thousand grievances, and poured them into the girl's tortured ear. One servant had been insolent, another had robbed her, and the third was lazy. People had greatly changed since her young days, and she did not know what the world was coming to.

Ada felt now more miserable at the Hall than she had ever felt before. It was the contrast to the other home that made her so. It was clear to the girl that the Rev. George Bendle's influence over Mrs. Sergeant was growing greater and greater every day, and Ada grew tired of hearing his self-satisfied voice. He would take advantage of the girl's dependent position to press his attentions upon her, although he knew well that she loathed him with all her heart and soul. He was the only person in the wide world that she hated, and it was a genuine hate too.

One evening, tempted by the beauty of the twilight, Ada went out into the grounds, that were of great extent. The house was an old-fashioned one, surrounded by a great brick wall that effectively shut out the wild searching wind. A few years back—only a very few years back—Everleigh had been only a little fishing village, but a railway had been built, and now all was changed. Mrs. Sergeant's grounds had houses built up to it on all sides, and she had been offered over and over again large sums of money by speculative builders, who wished to run streets through it, and build villas. Up till now she had refused, and most likely would not have changed her mind if she had been offered double the money. Mrs. Sergeant was very tenacious of purpose when she had once made up her mind. Ada was not sorry that the old lady refused to part with the grounds she had so often walked in and had learned to love.

She walked along under the thick canopy of leaves that the twilight could hardly penetrate, and listened to the good-night song of the birds. There was many a goodly tree in the grounds that it would be a pity to destroy, but there was a rumour afloat that the old lady would be obliged to sell her property for the benefit of town improvements.

She had often been heard to hope that she might die before that happened, and no doubt she meant what she said. Her love for the old place was the one redeeming touch in her nature. Even she had one soft spot.

Ada had no idea that she had been followed out of the house, nor did she hear the soft cat-like footsteps behind her. Although a very stout man, the Rev. George Bendle could walk very lightly on his feet. There was a smile on his face; perhaps the beauty of the evening made him happy and contented. It was a warm, genial summer evening, and Ada sat down upon a bench. She had not been there long when someone came up and sat down by her side. Turning round she saw the man she disliked more than all others. It was the Rev. George Bendle!

"I have been tempted out by the beauty of the evening as well as you," said the reverend gentleman, gazing up at the rose-tinted sky. "Perhaps you think, Miss Andell, that because I am a middle-aged man I cannot appreciate nature, but I have my moments of romance as well as you, although you may doubt what I say."

Ada made no reply, but looked annoyed and disturbed. She had too frank and open a nature to conceal her real feelings, even if she had desired to do so. Her keen appreciation of the twilight and the sound of the softly-stirred leaves had quite vanished now that this man had come on the scene.

"There is no reason why we should not be on good terms," went on the Rev. Bendle, giving the girl an admiring glance. "I am sure if you knew how much I thought of you, you would never be so hard-hearted, and would not say such bitter things. I am afraid I see you at your worst, Miss Andell. One who can take such a vivid interest in all that is so beautiful in nature cannot be hard-hearted."

"You always agree with all Mrs. Sergeant

says against me," says Ada; "and I cannot help thinking that you try to set her against me, and succeed, too."

"I agree with her because the old must be humoured, and not contradicted," observed the Rev. George Bendle, coming close up to the girl. "Thinking to catch you in a quiet mood, I have come to tell you something that has been a long time on my mind. May I call you by your Christian name?"

Ada would have certainly risen to her feet had not the gentleman taken possession of her hand, and forcibly retained it within his strong, repellent grasp.

"Let me go! pray let me go!" she said, in the greatest agitation, half tearfully.

"This is the opportunity I have been longing for, and you must listen to me!" observed the Rev. George Bendle. "Nay, little bird, it is no use struggling and fluttering. I am stronger than you, and am your master."

He spoke still softly, but there was a threatening look in his leaden-coloured face that made her really frightened of him. Before this, she had only felt a detestation for him, but now there was a vain terror at her heart, that the man saw plainly in her eyes.

"This is most cowardly! most cruel!" cried Ada. "I shall tell Mrs. Sergeant of your conduct immediately I return to the house! Release my hands immediately!"

He took no notice of her passionate words, and went on just as if she had not spoken, and as though she deigned to hear all that he had to say.

"I have long loved you, little one!" he said, rising as she rose, but still holding her hand; "and it is the desire of my life to make you my wife! Under the red and glowing light of this sunset, I swear that I love you more than life; and I would sacrifice anything to win you!"

"Your self-respect! your honour as a gentleman," said the girl, mockingly.

It was really quite absurd to listen to the man's extravagant language, and had not the matter been too serious for laughter, she would have laughed at his presumption.

"I will take no notice of your childish, impudent words, for I know I shall make you my wife in the end! Remember, I have Mrs. Sergeant on my side."

"If you could only look into my heart for one instant, you would know the bitter nature of my scorn, my utter loathing and contempt for you!" cried Ada, her voice betraying her growing indignation. "If I only had the strong, vigorous power of language to tell you what I desire to express, you would then know the uselessness of pressing your hateful attentions upon me! You would cease this annoyance!"

His face came nearer to her, and she struck him with her free hand, leaving an ugly mark. He receded from the blow, but released her. Then, for the first time in her life, she saw him in a passion.

"You shall suffer for this, my little lady!" he cried, his little, spiteful eyes glittering like newly-shined steel. "You will find this the most bitter day's work you have ever done in your life! The power I have over Mrs. Sergeant shall be used against you! I will use all my strength, all my energies, all my force of will, to render your life wretched! Slowly, quietly, insidiously, I will go to work; humiliating myself to gain this one object—that of lowering and shattering your prospects, and of bending your stubborn pride! You shall be turned out of house and home! You shall starve, and be clothed in the meanest rags! And then, when you have sunk as low as you can, I will search you out, and recall to you once again the blow you gave me!"

He gave her one lowering glance of fierce resentment; and turning sharply, quickly round, his distorted, quivering, hateful face was hidden from Ada, and she was free to return to the house.

There was no doubt in her mind but that he would keep his word; and she, girl as she was, felt powerless to fight against him. From that

very moment he set about a task so congenial to his nature.

On the following evening the Rev. George Bendle presented himself at the Hall, his face smooth and unruffled. In fact, he looked more sleek than ever, and spoke most kindly to Ada; but the girl understood him well. He exerted himself to the utmost to please Mrs. Sergeant, and succeeded even beyond his expectations and desires.

After this Ada's life became a torment, and the Rev. George Bendle saw with delight that she was growing pale day by day. The poisoned seeds of disension that he had planted very slowly taking root, and every hour the gulf between Mrs. Sergeant and Ada was growing wider and wider, and he knew well that things could not go on as they were going much longer. The train had been laid, and at last the mine exploded, for at length the spiteful scoundrel actually made the old woman believe that Ada was robbing her.

It was all in vain that the poor girl protested her innocence, threw herself on her knees before Mrs. Sergeant, and declared that she knew nothing about the matter. Certainly things looked very suspicious against her, for money and jewellery belonging to the old lady had been found in her box.

It had been placed there by a servant whom the Rev. George Bendle held in his power. She had lost her character, and the reverend gentleman had obtained the situation for her on the condition that she did the dirty trick, and she had consented.

The Rev. George Bendle was present when Ada's box was searched, and the property was discovered. He had the pleasure of seeing the girl sob and cry as if her heart would break, and he gave a subdued chuckle of fiendish enjoyment.

"Wretched, ungrateful girl!" said Mrs. Sergeant.

"I am innocent. I know not how the things came there," protested the girl, wringing her hands, and looking the picture of bewilderment and dismay.

"Dare you deny your guilt, you wretched creature?" almost shrieked the enraged woman. "There are other things missing; where are they?"

"I do not know, I cannot tell," said the girl.

"The police must be sent for. You shall spend your night in the police station!" said Mrs. Sergeant, trembling with passion.

"Don't, don't! Please don't send for the police!" cried the girl in piteous accents; and then, to the Rev. George Bendle's joy, she lay at the old woman's feet, humbled, sobbing, and despairing. He gazed at her quivering form, and pale, terrified face, as she lay huddled upon the floor in all the wild abandonment of her grief, and every sob she gave came like rich, throbbing music to his ears. Oh! his was a grand revenge—a revenge worth living for. No love could bring so much satisfaction as the gratification of a wild hate. For this he had plotted for many days, and at last his triumph had come.

"Let me think, let me think; for the love of Heaven let me think!" sobbed the girl, trying to take Mrs. Sergeant's hands.

"Shall I go for an officer?" said the Rev. George Bendle, with the greatest serenity. "Such depravity in one so young is very sad, very and indeed!"

"If she owns her guilt I may perhaps not give her in charge," observed Mrs. Sergeant; for, strange to say, she was just a little touched by the girl's suffering face, and did not wish to do anything rashly.

"Give me time to think!" cried the girl, putting her soft white hand to her throbbing head. "As yet I can hardly realise my position."

"My dear madam," expostulated the Rev. George Bendle, turning to the old lady, "if you let this offence pass you are simply encouraging crime, and giving a very bad example to your servants."

"Are these the words of a Christian minister?"

asked Mrs. Sergeant, sharply. "You ought rather to preach forgiveness, I should think!"

The reverend gentleman stammered out something so incoherently that Mrs. Sergeant could not understand his meaning.

"You shall have time to think," said Mrs. Sergeant, addressing the girl, "and I shall have time to think too; but, meanwhile, you must be locked up in your room in order that you shall not escape."

The girl was only too eager to consent to this suggestion, and thanked Mrs. Sergeant again and again.

"She has more influence over the old fool than I believed," thought the Rev. George Bendle, with a frown.

"Go to your room at once!" cried Mrs. Sergeant, stamping her foot.

The girl did not obey, but still lay there crouching in the same position, like some poor, pouting, frightened child shrinking from an unexpected blow.

The Rev. George Bendle, at Mrs. Sergeant's request, lifted her from the ground. At any other moment she would have resented each touch and pushed him away, but at that time she seemed quite unconscious as to who he was. There was only one idea in her poor aching head, and that was the fact that she was suspected of being a thief. He lifted her up with the greatest care, for he was a powerful man. Even then she would have fallen, for her limbs trembled under her, but for his supporting hand. Her hair had fallen in wild, beautiful disorder below her supple slender waist.

"Take her to the little back parlour and lock the door, and bring the key to me," commanded Mrs. Sergeant.

"Come!" said the Rev. George Bendle, taking her arm, and without the slightest resistance, obedient as a child, she quitted the room. She was not crying now, and she was suffering perhaps more intensely.

He took her to the back room and put her upon the couch with no gentle hand, and roughly shook her to attract her attention. She glanced at him with her dazed, beautiful eyes, like one in a dream, but she did not speak. There was a strange, choking, awful feeling at her chest.

"Listen," he said, roughly shaking her by the arm. "Listen well to what I say. You have suffered much, very much, but your suffering has only just commenced."

Then he hurried from the room and closed the door and carefully locked it after him, and returned to the old lady. She was sitting upright in her arm-chair, and seemed quite calm and composed.

"I am greatly shocked at finding that Ada had these things concealed in her box," said Mrs. Sergeant, pointing to the jewellery and gold that was scattered on the table.

"There is no doubt, in my mind, in the matter," responded the Rev. George Bendle, looking with longing eyes at the gold. "Can we doubt the evidence of our own senses?"

"Most likely she will confess in the morning, and then I'll spare her the indignity of a public exposure," said the old lady; "but, of course, she will have to leave my house at once."

"It is, indeed, very sad that such a state of things should exist," observed the reverend gentleman; "but those who have lived long in this weird world must be quite prepared for these kind of things."

"I have lived longer in the world than you have, and I was not at all prepared for this," said the owner of the Hall.

"Which shows your goodness of heart," replied the Rev. George Bendle; "but all poor frail mortals cannot expect to be like you. Good-bye, Mrs. Sergeant, good-bye." Then a sudden idea occurring to him he added, "I suppose you cannot spare a five-pound note for our new charity!"

"Take it—take it," said Mrs. Sergeant, more impatiently than she had ever spoken before.

Was his reign nearly over? Could it be that she had guessed the truth? An uncomfortable sensation came over the reverend gentleman, notwithstanding that he had the five sovereigns buttoned up safely in his pockets. Would there

come a time on this earth when his sins would find him out, and his true character be known to the world !

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the clock struck the hour of midnight Ada heard a key turned in the lock, and saw the door slowly open. Could it be that Mrs. Sergeant had changed her mind, and the police were coming to fetch her ? Her heart beat wildly, but she was not to be kept very long in suspense, for in another instant a girl entered the room, carrying a light and a tray in her hand. It was the very servant who had been forced to put the jewellery in Ada's box, and she bitterly regretted what she had done. But for the fear of George Bendle she would have told the truth, but he had a great power over her, and she dare not do it.

"Oh, miss, I am so sorry !" said the girl, as she put down the tray, on which was spread some tempting viands.

"Sorry that I should be a thief !" answered Ada.

"No, miss. I don't believe you guilty for one moment," said the girl, who had used the key of her own door to enter the room. Although she had not the strength of mind to tell of her complicity in the matter, she had come to make all the reparation she dare make. No one in the house had thought the captive would want food. Some of those in the Hall were quite indifferent to her, while others declared that whatever punishment she received it would serve her right. Mary was the only person who stood up for Ada.

"Oh, thank you so much, Mary !" said Ada, joyfully. "Then, at all events, I have one friend in the world."

At these words Mary felt almost inclined to sink to the earth, and became much agitated. Then she began to sob and cry, as Ada thought for sympathy with her. The girl felt tortured with the burden of the shameful, wicked trick she had played on an innocent person, and if she could have recalled the deed would gladly have done so. But it was too late, regrets were useless now.

"Indeed, miss, I deserve no thanks," persisted the girl. "I will—I cannot hear them."

"Mary, you are a dear, good, kind-hearted girl !" said the unsuspecting victim of Mary's treachery ; "and I shall never forget you, not as long as I live. People are so ready to judge harshly in this world."

"Do try to eat, my dear young lady !" said Mary, desirous to change the subject; then she poured out a glass of Burgundy, and made Ada drink it.

Ada did not refuse to eat, for she was very faint. It would have been foolish to refuse food considering all she would have to go through; besides, it would seem so ungracious to the girl who had taken all this trouble.

Mary stopped a great many hours with the captive, and tried to console her all she could. Ada felt a great deal more tranquil after Mary had left her, so powerful is the effect of human sympathy on a sad and weary heart. She even fell into a deep sleep, of which she stood in much need.

On the following day, after a painful interview with Mrs. Sergeant, Ada left the Hall—for ever as she believed. Many a sad and wistful look did she cast at the old place. She remembered the kind words of the doctor's wife, that if she was in any trouble she was to come to her.

Yes, she would go to Mrs. Armstrong at once, and tell her everything. It is doubtful if Mary had not been so kind to her that Ada would have gone to Mrs. Armstrong, but the girl's belief in her innocence had encouraged her to hope that others might think the same.

When she arrived at Rose Cottage Mrs. Armstrong was delighted to see her, and would have taken the girl in her arms, but, greatly to Mrs. Armstrong's surprise, Ada shrank away from her.

"Why, child, what is the matter ? How pale and worried you look !"

"Do not touch me—do not speak kindly to me, until I tell you all !" replied the girl, and

then, in an incoherent torrent of words, she told her friend what had happened.

Mrs. Armstrong listened intently, not interrupting her once.

"I cannot believe you capable of doing such a thing," said the doctor's wife, making Ada sit down in the most comfortable seat. "It is evident to me that you have some enemy at the Hall, who has placed the articles in the box, and when the doctor came home he was of the same opinion as his wife."

It was thought to be better for Ada to leave Everleigh at once, for the fact of her being accused of a crime would soon be spread over the neighbourhood, so Dr. Armstrong promised to use his influence to get her a situation.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE Ada had been away a month, Mrs. Sergeant became very unwell. The servants said that she had made herself ill fretting about the girl, but the doctor declared that she had caught a severe cold in consequence of the state of the weather.

Whatever the cause might have been, Mrs. Sergeant was in a bad state of health, and so greatly concerned was the Rev. George Bendle that he spent hours every day with the old lady.

Mrs. Sergeant never once mentioned Ada's name, but she often thought about her and wondered what had become of her. Sometimes, when the wind raged round the old house at night-time she breathed a fervent prayer that the girl was under shelter.

The old woman, harsh as she had been, suddenly made the discovery that Ada had a place in her heart. Guilty and ungrateful as she believed Ada to be, she would have forgiven her if she had returned.

It was terrible to think that, in all probability, Ada was homeless and starving, and it really had a bad effect on Mrs. Sergeant's rest that quite disturbed her. There was no gentle hand to smooth her pillow—no kindly voice to speak soothing words of comfort.

The Rev. George Bendle was well satisfied with the present state of things, and since Ada had refused his love he congratulated himself for having removed her from his path, for now the way was clear for him to slowly gain more influence over Mrs. Sergeant, day by day and hour by hour, resembling in his gradual progression a great human snail.

The Rev. George Bendle would read to her in his low, monotonous voice, but his reading did not fall on the ear half so pleasantly as the absent girl's voice had done. It was clear to the reverend gentleman that she was growing weaker, and that she was breaking up fast, and this caused him a great anxiety, for she had not made a will. What if, after all his plotting, she should leave him nothing !

As Mrs. Sergeant's infirmity progressed it seemed that her mind had grown clearer. She appeared to have a keener insight into everything, and it was noticed that she was no longer so inclined to speak harshly to the servants and make unreasonable demands upon them.

Mrs. Sergeant kept her own counsel, but it was gradually dawning upon her that the Rev. George Bendle was just a trifle more worldly than he pretended to be, and her confidence in him was passing away. From like to dislike, from trust to distrust, to a vague, undefinable fear.

But although her admiration for him had vanished, though all reliance in his disinterestedness had melted like snow under the rays of the sun, he still had influence over her that she could not throw off.

Often had she made up her mind to tell him not to come to her house again, but when he entered the room her courage would fail her, and his visits would be repeated on the morrow. So it went on, he being quite unsuspecting of the change that had come over the old lady's mind.

The first time she had reason to suspect the reverend gentleman was on the day her jewellery

had been discovered in Ada's box, for he had seemed to be so ready to condemn and so disinclined to forgive.

He had been so anxious to fetch the police, and had been so obviously disappointed when she had allowed Ada to leave the house in freedom.

If Ada had known of Mrs. Sergeant's state of health she would have risked everything and returned to her; but she was quite unaware that she was even indisposed.

The girl had obtained a situation in London through Dr. Armstrong's influence.

One evening Mrs. Sergeant came over in a deadly faint, and her medical adviser being sent for, he frankly told her that her days were numbered, and if she had any worldly affairs to settle she had better arrange them at once. He had expected that the old lady would be shocked and astonished at what he had told her, but she manifested no surprise.

"I have long expected this," observed Mrs. Sergeant. "I will send for Mr. Bell, my lawyer, at once."

Soon after the interview with the doctor, Mrs. Sergeant sent Mary with a telegram-form to the post-office. On her way there she met the Rev. George Bendle, who was going to the Hall. He took it out of her hand and read these words—

"Come down at once on a very important matter !"

"I suppose she intends to make her will," muttered the Rev. George Bendle, as he handed back the telegraph-form.

When he arrived at the Hall he found Mrs. Sergeant asleep in her arm-chair, and not wishing to awake her, walked out of the open French window on to the lawn.

Up and down the lawn he walked, with a look of anxiety on his face, pondering as to how Mrs. Sergeant would leave her money. Of course he would come in for a share of it, he had no doubt as to this. But how much would it be ? that was the question.

After about half an hour he grew weary of walking, and returned to the room to find it empty. Mrs. Sergeant had been awakened by the hot sun pouring upon her.

It was a very warm day, and the afternoon sun falling right on this chamber, she had retired to another room at the back of the house, through folding doors.

Old people and invalids often feel the warm days very unpleasant.

Scarcely had the Rev. George Bendle seated himself in the vacant arm-chair lately occupied by the mistress of the house when Mary entered the room, a letter in her hand, addressed to Mrs. Sergeant.

The man recognised the handwriting at once, and turned deadly pale. It was from Ada. It was an unfortunate time for the missive to arrive—just before Mrs. Sergeant was going to make her will.

"It is from Ada ! Give it to me, girl ; your mistress must never get it ! We must destroy it !"

"No, no !" said Mary, piteously. "Pray do not destroy it. Have we not done Miss Ada injury enough already by placing the jewellery in her box, and causing her to be suspected of a crime ? I have bitterly regretted my complicity in the matter a thousand times !"

"Hush, girl ! Someone might hear you !" said the Rev. George Bendle.

He had spoken too late. Someone had heard him. They heard a slight creaking sound made by the folding doors being thrown open, and Mrs. Sergeant walked slowly into the room.

The Rev. George Bendle uttered an exclamation of terror and confusion, for he could see by the old woman's stern expression that he was found out.

She did not speak till she came close to the man, who was trembling from head to foot, mean paltry coward as he was !

"So I have discovered your true character," she said, leaning on the stick she always walked with. "What prevents me from giving you both in charge for conspiracy ?"

"You won't do that, you would not think of that !" said the Rev. George Bendle. "Think

of the disgrace—the utter ruin you would bring upon me!"

As for the girl she said not a word in her defence, nor did she plead for mercy, thinking that she deserved none. Whatever the punishment law could inflict she would deserve it for her crime.

"Exposure, disgrace, ruin, all shall be yours!" cried Mrs. Sergeant, speaking in her excitement in a strong, clear, decided voice. "Who can spare or pity such a man as you, so low, so debased, so cowardly, so utterly despisable and rotten to the core? In sparing you I should be allowing a hypocrite and impostor to be at large. No, no; you have acted your part out to the dénouement. It is my turn now to play mine."

"There is no need for such violence, Mrs. Sergeant," stammered the Rev. George Bandle.

"But I will be violent!" cried Mrs. Sergeant. "It is only for the sake of the girl, who, I really believe, truly repents what she has done, that I do not give you in charge; but your true character shall be known, no matter where you go! Leave me now, and if you can, lead for the future a cleaner life."

The trembling wretch needed no second invitation to leave Mrs. Sergeant's presence, and he hurried from the room.

"The letter, the letter! He has taken Ada's letter with him!" said Mrs. Sergeant, a minute or two after he had gone. "Quick, Mary, call him back!"

Mary not only called, but she ran in the direction he had gone, but he was nowhere to be found, and so Ada's letter was lost, and in consequence Mrs. Sergeant was still in ignorance of her address.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. SARGENT'S lawyer came down as soon as possible, and a will was drawn up in Ada's favour. The old lady also gave him instructions to try and find out the girl's whereabouts, and in this matter he was to spare neither trouble nor expense.

"I must ask her to forgive me before I die," said the old lady.

"Rest assured, madam, I shall do my uttermost to find Miss Ansdell, and bring her to you," answered Mr. Bell.

The man was old and dry-looking, and no one would have given him credit for having any romance in him; but he had fallen really in love with Ada. She was the first woman he had ever learnt to love. Unfortunately his passion had come very late in life, bringing with it little hope of ultimate success.

Directly after taking his leave of Mrs. Sergeant the lawyer went to work in his quiet, methodical way. Mrs. Sergeant had advised him to employ private detectives, but he did nothing of the kind. He had entrusted one or two of the gentry, and had found them very slow to trace anyone out. It was to their interest, of course, to keep on a client as long as he went on paying. To find a person in a moment would be like killing the goose with the golden eggs. So, having this experience, Mr. Bell went to work himself.

Now the very first thing to do was to find out where Ada had gone when she had left the Hall. The porter at the lodge gate told him that she had taken the road to the right, and had been subsequently seen by a tradesman who had driven through a neighbouring village.

The lawyer at once drove to the village, and traced Ada to Dr. Armstrong's house. He found the doctor's wife at home, and explaining his errand the lady gave him Ada's address. She was still in the situation Dr. Armstrong had obtained for her, the doctor's wife informed him.

Quite elated by his success, and proud of his ability as an amateur detective, Mr. Bell took the first train for London, and went at once to the house in Bloomsbury-square where Ada lived. He found her looking pale, like one who had had something weighing heavily on her mind; but when he told her in clear, concise language of the

discovery of her innocence, a smile came into her face like a gleam of sunshine.

"How surprised Mrs. Sergeant will be that I have found you so soon!" observed Mr. Bell; Ada having obtained permission to absent herself, they were walking along Oxford-street.

That same evening they arrived at Everleigh, and drove straight to the Hall. The door was opened by Mary, who looked quite pale and startled, surprised and ashamed to meet Ada, the lawyer thought. He did not wonder at this, considering the injury she had done the young girl. But it was something more serious than that which made Mary so downcast, as he soon found.

"How is your mistress?" asked the lawyer. As for Ada she was too excited to speak. She felt quite grateful to get back to the old familiar place.

"My mistress is—dead," sobbed Mary. "She died an hour ago, and the last thing she said, miss, was, 'Ask Ada to forgive me.'"

We will pass over the funeral and will not describe Ada's grief at her loss. She was too grieved to think of her future position until Mr. Bell, the lawyer, reminded her of it.

"A short time ago Mrs. Sergeant made a will in your favour," he said, thinking as he spoke how handsome Ada looked in her black dress, but now it is nowhere to be found."

At first Ada was very little interested in the matter, but as her grief wore off it was natural that she should think of her worldly prospects, being young, strong, and hopeful.

"I have searched the house from basement to roof, and yet I cannot find the will," observed the lawyer, one morning. "Will you give me your assistance; and we will go over the whole place inch by inch? Sometimes women are much sharper in these matters than us men."

Ada consented to this, and they made a thorough investigation of the old place; but, greatly to their discomfiture, no will was forthcoming, and they fairly gave up in despair.

"This is a very serious matter, Miss Ansdell," said Mr. Bell. "For as there is no will to be found, this property will go to Mrs. Sergeant's nephew, John Reeve."

"He must be communicated with at once," replied Ada. Little did she think that John Reeve was the man who had saved her from the sea on that wild March day.

CHAPTER VII.

The day was out of season, and John Reeve was out of sorts; not exactly ill-humoured, but troubled, dispirited, discouraged. Autumn had set in early. His September holiday in the Lake District had been cold, gloomy, and wretched.

October was cloudy and chilly, with one week of foggy weather that was anything but lively, and here came in November, bright with sunshine.

It was very annoying that the weather should be fine the moment he returned to the office. He closed his big book with a bang, hastened it into the safe, turned his back to the office, and sauntered out into the street.

At the dining-room the odour of dinner was not appetising to him. In fact, he never seemed so near to going out of the world by his own consent as at that moment.

John Reeve had been brought up luxuriously. In his second collegiate year his father's fortune had been swept away by one of the financial revolutions that now and then overturn the best affairs.

The elder Reeve was a great invalid from paralysis. John went to work manfully. Indeed, he rather gloried in his Spartan pluck. The old man's three remaining years were just as full of comfort as those that had gone before.

When his father died the young man made a decided retrenchment. He began to save. He made a little outside his salary, which was not an extravagant one.

He meant some day to be a rich man again. He turned it over and over until this day it had taken one turn too far, and dropped flat. No wonder

he felt disheartened as he thought over his affairs.

"Mr. Reeve!" exclaimed his landlady, when he went home.

"Well!" he said, impatiently, and the woman looked at him in surprise, for he was generally so very polite.

"A gentleman called here about four, and said he would like to see you about eight this evening on some important business. He was a small, elderly man, and looked like a lawyer."

John sighed.

There might be even worse news now than he had heard that day. He lighted a cigar, and paced up and down the verandah in the little villa at St. John's Wood until the servant summoned him.

He felt like going to be executed. When he entered his room a small, elderly man, who was standing by the mantelpiece, glanced up at him strangely.

"Mr. John Reeve," he said, in rather suspicious tones, suggestive of some personal injury.

"Yes!" somewhat ungraciously.

"I am Mr. Bell, of the firm of Bell and Anderson."

"Well, I believe I have never seen you before!" said the young man, somewhat indifferently.

But although he concealed it he really felt curious to know the object of the visit.

"I have seen you before!" replied the lawyer, with a nervous gesture. "You are the son of Edward Reeve. You can prove this, of course!"

"Yes, but I do not see—"

"I am coming to that. Your aunt, Mrs. Sergeant, is dead!"

"And I am bidden to the funeral!" asked John Reeve, and he laughed at the ridiculousness of the thing, for he and his aunt were at daggers drawn.

"She was buried three months ago!"

"Ah!"

He would not ask if there was any money.

"Perhaps you do not know," he said, with a curiously alert air, as if he half suspected the young man, "that all your aunt's relations are dead, with the exception of yourself. So, there being no other relation, you have inherited the property."

The lawyer spoke sharply and resentfully, John Reeve thought.

"Then instead of being a poor clerk, working all day at the desk, I am now a rich man, and have a grand home somewhere or other!"

He began to be very interested, and actually smiled.

"There are many acres, and they will prove a handsome fortune," observed the lawyer. "Your aunt made a will, and I did not wish her to keep it; but she would, and it cannot be found, although I have searched in every nook and corner."

"Did she will it to me?"

"No; she did not!"

"Then the will may turn up at any moment!" said John Reeve, looking greatly disappointed, "and I shall have to return to the desk!"

"She had an adopted daughter—a child she took when her mother died. The child is now a woman, and she left everything to her."

"I cannot help saying that I am pleased that the will is lost," observed John Reeve, meeting the lawyer's eyes, and speaking in his free, straightforward way. It was John's rôle in life never to appear better than he really was.

"You wouldn't naturally be glad to come into your aunt's property!" said the lawyer, and he looked at John Reeve from out of his half-closed eyes.

Having an eye to Ada's interests the lawyer quite disliked John; but he could not help admitting, reluctantly enough though, that the young man was honest and true. He would have liked to be able to find some fault with him, but he could not do so.

"My aunt had no justification for leaving the estate away from the family to one who is really a stranger," said John. "Blood is thicker than water, you know."

"Well, perhaps after all she did destroy the

"will," said Mr. Bell, miffily, "but I cannot help hoping that it will turn up. If I had my way I'd have the whole place pulled down brick by brick."

"I daresay you would," said John Reeve. "Have you anything further to say, Mr. Bell? But first of all let me ask you a question. Where is this adopted daughter now? Is she still remaining in the house?"

"No, she was too proud to remain," replied the lawyer. Then added, giving John Reeve a very black look. "It is very hard on her, you know. Your aunt meant all the property for her, but the will being lost you are the real heir."

"Do you mean to say that I ought to throw it up?" asked John, with indignation in his eyes.

The idea seemed so unreasonable, and it made John's blood boil to think that a practical man like the lawyer could entertain such a foolish notion.

"I never thought for a moment that you would be generous enough to throw it up," observed the lawyer; "but could there not be some arrangement, some division?"

"You talk very coolly about other people's property," said John Reeve, thinking that the lawyer had a great amount of audacity. "Come, now, how much is the whole thing worth?"

"A few years ago," replied Mr. Bell, "Everleigh was a very small place; but a railway being built in the neighbourhood it has changed from a little fishing village to a fashionable seaside resort. This has increased the value of the property immensely."

"I spent a few days there last spring," observed the young man.

"Well, they are building everywhere now, and while your aunt lived she prevented all improvements. She could not bear to see the old ground broken up into lots; but now she is dead I suppose you will make no opposition. Streets must come through. They are staked out now, and the affair had better be settled, you see. You had better come down and arrange matters at once."

"As to the value of it!" said John, impatiently, for it seemed to him that the lawyer was very slow in explaining matters.

"Fifty thousand at least! The property will be sold in no time. I know for a fact that people are waiting to buy them."

"I shall realise as quickly as I can," said John.

"The property should be in the market at once!" observed the lawyer, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He was very much excited, while John Reeve was quite cool and collected. "The streets are decided upon; and even if your aunt had lived she could not have delayed the march of improvement much longer. Miss Ansdell and I did all we could to delay the business until we could communicate with you."

John Reeve was beginning to be moved, but felt sure that he should hate Miss Ansdell. No doubt the lawyer and the woman were a couple of conspirators. His father had always brought him up to think badly of the girl as a kind of usurper.

"You can rely upon my looking after my own interests!" said John Reeve, and he rose from his chair to show that the interview was at an end. "I shall run down to Everleigh at once, and see if further matters can be discussed then. Good evening, Mr. Bell!"

The lawyer hesitated for a moment, and then said deprecatingly,—

"Surely you are not capable of turning her out destitute—Miss Ansdell, I mean!"

"She is in no way related to me. I believe I am the heir," replied John Reeve, stiffly. "She has shown good sense in getting out of the place before I came down to turn her out!"

"Good evening!" said the lawyer, quite disgusted with John Reeve now. He left the house with the idea of being dismissed. He had taken a dislike to the new hair simply because he was the owner of the property that Mr. Bell considered Miss Ansdell ought to have.

John Reeve presented himself at the office

next morning, resigned his situation, and then went straight down to Everleigh. He thought over the whole matter while he was in the train. It seemed to him that the whole affair was nothing but a dream, and that he would wake up and find himself a poor hard-working clerk again.

Finding a superior hotel in Everleigh he had some lunch, and then, after this, went to look at the estate, which was not at all difficult to find out.

If he had thought himself in a dream up to now, he found the Hall substantial enough to dissipate all such fancies. It was an old weather-beaten stone building, and surrounded by a high brick wall, that was an eyesore to the neighbourhood. He saw at once the great improvement he could bring about, as well as the cash in hand the estate promised.

He found himself quite a man of consequence. Twenty-four hours had changed the aspect of affairs. He could almost smile at the thought of the loss of the unlucky mining shares that his father had speculated in.

John Reeve took his business out of Mr. Bell's hands at once, but, before dismissing him, he settled a handsome sum upon Miss Ansdell, after thinking the matter over. John Reeve was a good-hearted master, but he had naturally resented the lawyer's interference in the matter. He must give of his own free will or not at all.

Strange to say he felt no curiosity to see Miss Ansdell, and did not even ask where she had gone, or what she was doing. If he had only known who the girl really was, how eager he would have been to see her!

The young man's surprise may be imagined when Miss Ansdell returned his gift with a haughty missive. She was no meddler to accept charity from a stranger. Need we say that he thought all the better of her for her independence. After this he even felt a slight curiosity to see the girl.

John found Everleigh delightful, and enjoyed himself immensely. He could not help feeling the importance of his position as the leading man of the place. However, there was one bitter ingredient in the cup of his prosperity, but he was too young not to be interested, and with his usual energy commenced a system of improvements at once.

Winter was late in coming. The new streets were pushed on with wonderful rapidity ready for the spring. Poor Mrs. Sargeant must have turned in her grave at the desecration. It altered the appearance of the town greatly.

John found that he had hosts of friends, and they really rejoiced in his good fortune. He had stepped out of their circle when his father's reversal came, but seven years is not a lifetime. He asked two or three artistic friends out to pass opinions on the changes he had made.

Masons, carpenters, and decorators filled the place, though he had the good sense not to modernise too much. He would have the old south room transformed into a library; two smaller ones turned into a reception-room; the dining-room enlarged by making the kitchen smaller. It kept him so busy and interested that spring came upon him before he was aware.

All this time he had given many thoughts to old Mrs. Sargeant's will. Not a wall or a closet had been torn out without a curious fear on his part of some mischance, but nothing had happened.

The good people of Everleigh would have been sadly disappointed at any such untoward event. These were mostly old families, some of them going back a hundred or two years, and that the Hall should return to one of the lawless line satisfied their sense of justice.

Besides, when Ada turned her back on old Mrs. Sargeant, she deliberately chose her future, and cut herself off from her chance of succeeding. That she should be forgotten at the eleventh hour was hardly fair.

Then too, John Reeve was young, energetic, enthusiastic, public spirited. Some of his suggestions for the improvement of the place were admirable. He subscribed at once to the town-hall and the proposed free library, and made friends on every side.

Truth to tell, John fairly revelled in his new fortune. There was a certain feeling of lawful right in the inheritance. Poverty he had always hated, though he had taken it up manfully; but he liked pleasure, leisure, cultured friends, and luxurious surroundings. He was not foolishly extravagant, nor ostentatious, but as his money came in freely he spent it in the same manner. By spring time no one would have recognised the place.

He found a nice, middle-aged housekeeper, a man for outdoor work and to care for his home; and in a month's time they would have gone through fire and flames for him. Indeed, it was easy to see that John Reeve was born for good fortune rather than ill.

He could hardly imagine himself back at his old desk. John Reeve and Mr. Bell met occasionally, and he began to respect the lawyer's sterling worth. After two or three talks about Miss Ansdell her name was never mentioned between them.

Six months had run its rapid course, and John Reeve felt certain that nothing would be found. In the contingency of the will turning up, he hardly knew whether he would contest it or not.

Mrs. Sargeant had been so strange and eccentric that it would not be difficult to prove her incompetent if he chose to do so.

John now regretted having taken his affairs out of Mr. Bell's hands.

The lawyer seemed to bear him no animosity for having done so, and they had become the firmest friends, as people often do who begin by hating each other.

Christmas Eve found John Reeve in London. And, having spent a quiet life of late, he entered into the gaieties with renewed zest. One evening he went to a musical, with a supper later on. The singing, though not professional, was very fine. One girl in particular pleased him greatly, and his curiosity was aroused to see her face.

She suddenly rose from the piano, and he obtained a glimpse of her face, and then fell to wondering where he had seen it before. He cudgelled his brain in vain at first, and then he suddenly recollects his adventure at the seaside. The girl he had saved from the sea was standing before him!

Ada and John were introduced, but they could not catch each other's names in the confusion and noise; but the young man was certain that the girl had recognised him, for the blood came surging to her face.

"I am glad of this opportunity of thanking you for the service you rendered me!" observed Ada.

John stammered a few incoherent words, denying any particular merit in what he had done, but told her that he was very pleased that he had been of service to her.

They got on very pleasantly together, and without any restraint; and the old lawyer who had taken care to have Ada invited to the party, chuckled to himself, for he wished them to fall in love with each other.

"I thought her beauty would attract him!" muttered the lawyer.

At this moment some one came up and mentioned John Reeve by name, and the girl turned deadly pale. She had been talking to the man whom she had learned to regard as her deadly enemy—the man who had deprived her of that which she had been brought up to regard as her own!

A strange pallor came over her face, and there was a dismal quiver of the lips. He was about to walk beside her, when she turned upon him with a fierce frown, saying,—

"I hate you!"

It was a very rude thing for a lady to say, but she had acted on the impulse of the moment, as even the best bred person will sometimes.

Quite startled by her sudden change of manner, he left her with a pained expression on his face; but late in the evening he found her quite alone by the window, and crossed over to her.

"It has been quite a delightful evening!" he said, trying to steady his voice.

(Continued on page 496.)

THE MYSTERY OF ALANDYKE.

CHAPTER II.

To her life's end Nell never quite forgot that meeting. Had she only been free to obey her own wishes she would have retraced her steps, and have gone back to the schoolroom; but this could not be. Lady Daryl raised her head, and made an imperceptible sign to her to seat herself before a tray of silver and china.

It dawned on the young governess, suddenly, her company had been requested, not for her own amusement or pleasure, but simply that she might fill the office of a fire maker.

As in a dream she took in every detail of the room—the lovely Venetian mirror, the pale-blue stain of the upholstery, and Lady Daryl's magnificent attire. In her quiet dress Nell felt almost like a blot upon the luxurious scene.

Guy Vernon had never raised his eyes. She could not even see if he had recognized her. The servants brought in a silver coffee equipage, and Nell, with trembling fingers, began her task.

"Where is your master?" asked Lady Daryl.

"Sir Jocelyn will not take coffee, my lady." But his sister-in-law would not accept the answer.

"I am not going to be put off with an excuse the first night of my return!" she said, firmly. "I shall go and fetch my brother, Mr. Vernon."

"Shall I go?" See shook her head.

"That would probably end in my losing you both." Then she turned to her governess. "You need not pour out the coffee, Miss Stuart, until I return."

Nell could see a strange change pass over Mr. Vernon's face as he caught the name. When the door had closed upon his hostess he came over to the centre table.

"Nell!" he cried; "is it really you, my darling? What has brought you to Yorkshire?"

She turned on him with bitter scorn, knowing as she did that another woman held his promise; it seemed to Nell the cruellest insult that he should speak to her thus.

"I am not your darling!" she cried, hoarsely. "I have come to Yorkshire to earn my own living; but I would rather have starved in London than come here had I known it was to meet you!"

Guy Vernon looked into her face with a dangerous passion in his blue eye.

"Is this little Nell? Child, have you changed your whole nature?"

"No, you have. You have made me a miserable, desolate woman!"

"Nell, we love each other," he said, persuasively. "Nothing can alter that. Can't you be content to know you are my best and dearest without the fact being proclaimed to the world?"

"I am nothing to you but a stranger," she said, sternly. "I know all now, Mr. Vernon, the truth you kept so carefully from me. No wonder you wished our engagement to be a secret, when before you ever saw me you had plighted your troth to another!"

"I never loved her, Nell—never once!"

"Does that make it any better?" asked Nell, in a kind of dull, heavy voice. "She is an heiress, so you will marry her."

The door opened, and Lady Daryl appeared, followed by her captive, Sir Jocelyn Leigh. She looked as though he had left his study sorely against his will. Nell watched him furtively, and wondered if he knew the stories his servants had told of him. Somewhat his face did not look cruel or mean. He was not in the least like Nell's preconceived ideas of a man who has broken his wife's heart, and lives under a curse.

He talked pleasantly enough on many subjects, rallied Guy upon his abstraction, and tried to induce him to prolong his visit.

"No thanks," said Mr. Vernon's blue eyes shot a glance in Nell's direction. "I must run up to town next week. To-morrow I shall have to

leave my pleasant quarters, with many thanks for your hospitality."

"You will always be welcome," said the Baronet, in his grave, stately way. "While I have a house in which to receive my friends, Guy, there will be a place for you."

"You talk as if you were on the verge of bankruptcy, Jocelyn!" remonstrated his sister. The Baronet sighed almost as though that calamity, indeed, threatened him. Then he carried his coffee-cup across to the centre table, and waited while Nell replenished it.

Perhaps he thought how white and tired she looked. Perhaps he remembered the many miles she had travelled, for as he took the cup from her hand he said courteously,

"Pray do not remain here longer than you like, Miss Stuart. I dare say you are tired."

She rose at once, thankful to escape. Lady Daryl bowed to her with careless condescension; Guy looked fixedly into the fire, but the master of Alandyke held the door open for her with the respectful courtesy he might have shown a duchess.

"Where did you find that girl?" he asked his sister, when Miss Stuart had disappeared.

"Now don't grumble, Jocelyn. I know she is much too young for the post; but she was the only creature I could persuade to come so far, and who was content only to go home once a year."

"Poor child!" said Jocelyn, half pityingly; "she can't have a very happy home if she is so anxious to leave it."

"Her mother is a widow, and she is very poor," said Lady Daryl. "I hope she'll answer; I really feel tired of so many changes."

Guy Vernon had not spoke a single word since Nell left the room. Somehow, base and heartless as he had proved himself, it was gall and wormwood to him to hear her discussed like this.

Her fair, sweet face had been in his thoughts a great deal since their parting; more than once he had wavered in his decision; more than once he had been tempted to seek her out and tell her that he could not live without her; that even his ambition, his need of money, must give way to his love for her; and now it was too late. She knew how he had deceived her, and those grey eyes would never look at him again with anything but scorn.

"One comfort, she will never marry anyone else," he thought, jealously. "She might as well be in a convent, as shut up here with those two children. I shall never have to yield you to another, little Nell; never have to think of your dainty grace as the ornament of another man's home."

Nell had gone upstairs to her own room, threading her way with caution through the many passages. A bright fire burnt in the grate; wax candles were lighted; evidently Sir Jocelyn's meanness did not extend to depriving his house of ordinary comforts.

As far as Miss Stuart could judge in temporal things, her lot was cast in a pleasant place. Drawing an easy chair to the fire she sat down to think over the events of the day, and while she thought her eyes wandered round the room. It was furnished in light satin wood; a warm crimson carpet and curtains of the same hue gave it a very cheerful air, but it had one drawback—there were no less than four doors—to look at all exactly alike.

Four doors! To a timid girl who had never passed a night alone in her life these four doors were not a source of comfort. Holding a lighted candle she walked slowly past them on a voyage of discovery. One led into the schoolroom, another communicated with the corridor, a third revealed a large cupboard, but the fourth no person would open.

In vain Miss Stuart endeavoured to turn the handle; in vain she pulled and pulled, the door refused to open, and Nell decided to give it up; but she did not like it. Carefully she locked and bolted the three other doors, but the fourth troubled her the most of all. It could not lead to any passage. Was there another room beyond, and what use was made of it? Nell hoped that if the Leigs boasted a family ghost, this shut up door did not lead to his special territory.

She was thoroughly upset. Little wonder, considering she had that day broken through every association of her childhood, and been parted for the first time in her life from her little sister. Add to this that she had travelled over two hundred miles, and had received a shock severe enough to unnerve the strongest woman, and you will have some idea of the state of poor Nell's feelings when at last she uncoiled herself in bed and pulled the soft elder down quill over her shoulders.

She was tired to death, but she could not sleep. The bright glow from the fire made the room as light as day; every article in it was visible, even the objectionable door. Nell tossed about restlessly from one side to the other. She was weary, heartick, and so sad. Oh! why could she not enjoy the forgetfulness of sleep?

It was barely eleven. In Camberwell there would have been quite a cheerful stir at this time, and No. 6, Bilby-road, in particular, would have rejoiced in the rattle of plates and knives as the little maid-of-all-work cleared away her master's supper; but here a vast hush was on everything—here such an awful stillness reigned that Nell could hear the beating of her own heart.

Boom—boom—boom! The girl started up in bed in an agony of terror, but it was only a distant clock chiming midnight. Nell fell back on her pillows, scolding herself soundly for her terror. The fire was growing dim now, the candles were near their sockets. An awful dread of being alone in the dark came to Nell, and she made a fearful effort to compose her mind for slumber. What had she heard about counting sheep as a true cure for wakefulness? She began upon it energetically. Already it was taking effect; her feet and talls were becoming involved in a terrible confusion, when a new terror assailed her. She heard the sound of footsteps so distinctly that she felt as if someone were about to invade her room. Instinctively she turned her eyes to the fourth door—the one which had refused to open—as though she expected her nocturnal visitor to make his entry by that particular means.

Creak—creak—creak! as of someone with a naturally heavy tread trying laboriously to step softly. Then a strange extra brightness in the room, and the noise of a person sorting papers, a rustling of leaves, a turning of pages.

Nell could bear it no longer. Jumping out of bed she wrapped herself in her blue flannel dressing gown, and went cautiously to the door. Sure enough there was a light beyond it, and the sound of someone moving cautiously to and fro, as though desirous not to be heard.

All the blood in Nell's body ran cold. She stood there almost frozen, and yet not daring to go back to bed. She was only conscious that beyond that door was someone who had no right to be there—someone who had taken every precaution to hide their visit.

Nell writhed herself back in Bilby-road. She thought, sadly, people never properly appreciated the value of next-door neighbours. Why at home it would have been easier to rouse the inhabitants of every house in the road than it would have been here to get the assistance of a single human creature.

She never knew how long the noises lasted. At length they ceased. She heard a door close, and a key turn in the lock, then some heavy footsteps pass her door, and then nothing but a great calm.

The fire was almost out, the candles expiring fast. Nell clambered back to bed, buried her face in the clothes, and, fairly worn out with fatigue and excitement, fell asleep.

The January sunshine was coming into her room when she awoke, and the maid who had brought her tea the night before stood at her bedside with a cup of coffee.

"It's eight o'clock, please, miss. Breakfast in the schoolroom is at nine. Nurse thinks it doesn't do the little girls any good to get up early these dull winter mornings."

It struck Nell they could have very little waking life, judging by the time they got up and went to bed; then her terror of the night before re-

turned to her, and she determined to try to solve her doubts.

"Nancy, where does that door lead to? I wanted to fasten it last night, only I couldn't see any key."

"Oh, that door's right enough, miss. It leads into my lady's boudoir. These three rooms were hers in her last illness; her one cry was to be away from every sound, and these are the quietest in the house. They're in a wing by themselves, so to say, and that's just what she wanted."

Nell sipped her coffee tremulously.

"And what is the nearest room to this?"

Nancy looked puzzled.

"There's nothing very near, Miss Stuart. Whichever way you turn there's a long corridor before you come to any more rooms."

Miss Stuart shuddered. She wondered if her predecessors had inhabited this bedroom, and shared her terrors.

"I suppose I shall get used to it," she said, "alowly, "but it seems very lonely at first."

"I daresay it does, miss. It always scares me if I sleep near a locked-up room, and my lady's boudoir has been locked up ever since she died. When you're in the grounds, miss, you'll notice one window with the blinds always down. It must be five years turned since Lady Leigh's death, and those blinds have never been raised yet."

"Then no one ever sleeps there!"

"Sleeps there! There's no bed, miss; and if there were twenty I don't know who'd care to sleep there. My lady died in that room, you see, Miss Stuart, and all her things are there just as she left them. I doubt if anyone's been in since the time when she lay there in her coffin."

Nancy vanished, and the governess went on with her toilet, hardly cheered by what she had heard. Nell was not superstitious. She never imagined, as some girls would have done, that the ghost of the late Lady Leigh promenaded the boudoir, but she did honestly believe there was something strange about the house, and she wished from the bottom of her heart she had anyone, no matter whom—even a child who had been company—to share her splendid solitude.

Dressing does not take long when there is little choice of attire. Nell was soon ready.

Breakfast was laid, and, in spite of her restless night, in spite of that sad heart-trouble, Nell was glad to see preparations for the meal. She stood by the fire wondering what strange mystery shadowed Alandyke, when the door opened and two children came in.

They were utterly unlike anything the governess had pictured to herself. The little Leighs had nothing about them of the picturesque delicacy or weird sadness you might have expected from motherless little ones. They were merry, laughing little creatures, with black curling hair, black eyes, and a peach-like bloom on their rounded cheeks. They bore no resemblance to their father; there were none of the Leigh characteristics in their dimpled faces; but they were pretty, artless little things, and they made friends with Nell directly, even promising of their own accord to take her for a long walk directly after lessons.

Whatever the shadow which rested on Alandyke it had not touched these children. Sitting on either side of Nell they devoured bread and milk with true north country appetites, and when their hunger was satisfied, entertained their governess with a severe cross-examination about London.

"We are going to London some day," announced Adela, gravely; "father says so."

"Yes," continued Mab; "and I shall ask father not to let Aunt Daryl come too; then we shall have him all to ourselves."

Lessons followed breakfast, and for these the Misses Leigh had little relish; they had evidently thus far little respect for learning. Neither of them could read, and their plump, dimpled fingers seemed quite strangers to the mystery of penmanship.

Twelve o'clock came at last. With a sigh of relief Nell released her pupils to prepare for their

walk; then, as she mechanically put on her cloak and hat, it dawned on her dimly that this had been the longest morning of her life.

Back came the little girls, and the procession started.

The grounds of Alandyke were so extensive that there was no need for Miss Stuart and her pupils to leave the Park; indeed, Adela and Mab confided to her they hardly ever did leave it. There was so much to see in the grounds, so very little interesting beyond them, that the little girls hardly ever passed through the great gates except on Sunday.

It was a lovely spot, even in winter, when the trees were bare and the ground covered with hard masses of white snow. Helene Stuart acknowledged that she could not desire a fairer scene. Nature seemed to have lavished her fairest gifts on Alandyke; the beautiful open country, the wild Yorkshire scenery, the distant moorland, all was pleasant to the sight, and all, wherever the eye rested, was the property of Sir Jocelyn Leigh.

"He ought to be happy," mused the lonely girl. "If ever a beautiful home could make a man contented Sir Jocelyn should be satisfied."

Even as she thought the children left her side. They rushed at madcap speed towards a tall figure in the distance, and Nell could dimly discern Mab being lifted proudly aloft, whilst Adela clung to some friendly hand. She walked slowly after the runaways, and saw that they were with their father. Nancy had said he hated children, but there was no hatred in the face which looked at his little daughters. He put them down abruptly as their governess advanced.

"Good morning, Miss Stuart. So you are making acquaintance with the park. What do you think of it?"

"I think it the loveliest place I ever saw. You must be very happy, Sir Jocelyn, to have such a home."

The baronet never answered her; one would have said the north-east wind troubled him, for he shivered terribly.

"I am glad you like it," he said, at last. "I hope the north country breeze may put a little colour in your cheeks. You are looking very delicate."

Nell would as soon have expected a china statue to remark on her appearance.

"I am perfectly well, thank you, Sir Jocelyn. I never have a colour."

"Not like my little maids. I expect you find them terribly spoilt, Miss Stuart!"

Nell wondered dimly who did the spoiling, but before she could put this into words her employer had departed.

Yet another meeting destined for Miss Stuart before she got back to her schoolroom. She was not surprised when she came suddenly upon Gay Vernon. Somehow she had guessed he would seek her before he left Alandyke.

"Send the children away!" he said, impatiently.

"I shall do no such thing!"

He took the office on himself, setting the pair to run races, and when they had safely started he turned to Nell,—

"I am going away to-day."

"So you told Lady Daryl last night."

"And before I go I have come to you for your answer. Nell, are you going to keep to the cruel terms you laid down the other evening?"

"Yes!"

"You can be off!"

"You never were mine!" harshly. "Don't you confess yourself another holds your word?"

"But she is not like you."

"No; she is rich and great, therefore you will keep faith with her. She will owe your fidelity to the fact that she is not like me."

"You are very bitter!"

"You taught me to be so!"

"Shall you stay here?"

"Yes, as long as I give satisfaction to my employer. It is a pleasant place, and it doesn't matter much to me where I am."

"You'll be buried alive!"

"I shall be safe and at peace."

He put one hand upon her arm.

"I never thought it would come to this."

"It has come to what you wished for—your

freedom. Mr. Vernon, will you let me pass. I want to rejoin my pupils."

"Not yet!" he said, hotly. "I shall not let you go until you have answered me one question!"

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall read your answer in your face. Have you met anyone else? Have you broken with me for another?"

If scorn could have killed her eyes would have slain him as he stood.

"I broke with you because I found you false and heartless. I have never seen another man I could love—I may add, I have no desire to do so. Love has not brought me so much happiness I should desire to undergo its pain again."

The children came running back. Nell took one in either hand and set off homewards. She answered them rather at random, but they little guessed the reason.

Mr. Vernon left Alandyke, and Nell found the set routine of her governess life really began. It was terribly dull—dull almost to pain. She had nothing to complain of; she was delicately lodged and daintily fed; the servants treated her with respect, Lady Daryl with kindness; the master she never saw. She knew that he had gone away for a month; he would only return when his stately home was full of guests.

No, she had nothing to complain of, and yet there seemed no interest in her life—no sorrow, no joy, only a monotonous routine of daily duties—a heavy calm, which had no light or shade, no relief from its trying sameness.

It came on her sometimes with a pang that she could bear this life no longer; that any pain, any suffering, would have been better than this dull calm; that she would have been better off in the shabby lodgings in Bilby-road than in Sir Jocelyn Leigh's splendid home.

Lady Daryl she very seldom saw. The widow did not affect children, and she chose to consider Miss Stuart's time fully occupied with her little charges. Nell had been a whole month at Alandyke, and it seemed to her more like a year, when one February night, as she sat over the schoolroom fire, a gentle tap came at door.

"Come in!" said Nell, half mechanically, not even troubling herself to wonder whom it could be.

There entered a girl, two or three years her junior, and as great a contrast to her as could be imagined. The newcomer was very small, and almost of fairylike proportions; her jutty hair was quite short, and clustered round her head in soft rings of nature's own curling.

Nell gazed at her in bewilderment. She was so pretty, she had such a bewitching air, that the governess believed for a moment she was the victim of a dream.

"Don't stare at me so!" said the intruder, merrily. "I'm quite human. I have come to stay for ever so long."

"To stay here?"

"At Alandyke. Of course I won't stay here in this room, if you object; but I am so dull I feel as if I should go crazy if I hadn't someone to speak to."

"That is just how I feel," confessed Nell.

"Then you ought to sympathise with me. Lady Daryl doesn't a bit. She has gone to sleep now. Fancy anyone going to sleep at nine o'clock."

"Perhaps she was dull, too."

The stranger shook her head.

"She told me I was too much for her, and she wished her brother was at home to entertain me."

"I can't fancy Sir Jocelyn entertaining any one."

"Can't you! He does it beautifully, and yet he always makes me feel sad. I wonder what his wife could have been like that he mourns her so?"

"But does he?"

"Of course he does. He might have married again a dozen times if he had liked."

"Perhaps he thought once enough."

"I suppose it is," the large eyes growing

thoughtful. "Marriage sounds a very solemn thing. I am going to be married myself soon."

"Are you?"

"Yes. Do you know who I am?"

"Not the least in the world!"

"I am the children's cousin, Isabel Vernon. How you start! Are you in any pain?"

"Oh no! I—I—Won't you sit down, Miss Vernon?"

Isabel accepted the invitation.

"Mamma was Sir Jocelyn's only sister, and so I have always been here a good deal, though my real home is with uncle Vernon."

"And you are going to be married?"

"In the spring. People think I am too young to take upon myself the care of housekeeping before, but Guy and I are very sensible. We're not the least in a hurry."

She spoke with the utmost calm. Guy was her cousin. She had been brought up to look on him as her future husband. Their union had been decided by their parents before she could speak, so why should she blush or look foolish when the alluded to it?

The woman who had once hoped to be Guy Vernon's wife put out her hand to her winsome rival. She was poor, Isabel an heiress, and yet somehow it seemed to Nell Miss Vernon needed more pity than herself, since she was to be married for what she had, not for what she was.

"I hope you will be very happy, Miss Vernon."

"I hope so. Don't call me Miss Vernon. Say Bell; everyone always calls me Bell. What's your name?"

"Helena."

Bell stroked the folds of her dress.

"And you have actually stayed five weeks at Alandyke. Do you know a month is the utmost any of your predecessors attempted?"

"I mean to stay always."

"Always?"

"Till the children are grown up. I suppose it will be necessary for me to move on then. I shall be quite middle aged by that time."

"But you'll marry long before that."

"I shall never marry anyone!"

Bell looked at her.

"I expect you will, all the same, Miss Stuart. Won't you give me an invitation to come to your schoolroom whenever I feel dull."

Nell carefully refrained from giving the invitation, but as the young heiress came without it that made little difference; and after the first pain was over, at finding herself the constant companion of Guy's future wife, Isabel's visits were a real pleasure. The girl had such an innate joyousness in her nature that instinctively she brightened every creature with whom she came in contact.

"Uncle is coming home to-morrow," she proclaimed, one afternoon; "and the next day a number of visitors will be here. Lady Daryl loves to fill Alandyke with guests; she always fancies some one or other will fascinate her brother."

Nell looked a little doubtful.

"What do you think about it?"

"He will never marry again," returned Bell. "I asked him once, and he said so."

"How could you?"

"I can say anything."

"Do you remember your aunt?"

"Not at all. I have heard she was a miserable invalid. I don't think she ever got over her son's death. It's a thousand pities uncle doesn't marry."

"Have you told him so?"

"Yes; and he politely informed me I understood nothing about it."

There was a busy hum of preparation the next day, and Nell and her pupils stationed themselves at the schoolroom window to watch the arrival. Miss Stuart was a little indignant that the children had not been summoned below to bid their father welcome, but Adela and Mab took the omission in good part.

"Father is sure to come upstairs to see us, he always does."

And, true enough, before he had been in the house an hour Sir Jocelyn came to the school-

room, and sitting down took a little daughter on each knee.

Nell escaped somehow; she felt miserable and out in the cold as she witnessed that meeting. She was not left long to chew the cud of reflection; very soon little Mab came to fetch her. Sir Jocelyn welcomed her with a strange, eager gratitude, as he thanked her for her care of his little girls; then with a strange hesitation he presented her with a bracelet of real Genoese silver, as a gift from Adela and Mab.

"I hope you are comfortable with us," he said, slowly, "and that you can make up your mind to stay at Alandyke."

"I am very comfortable."

"There are tears in your eyes," said Sir Jocelyn, quickly; "has anyone been unkind to you?"

"No one!"

"And you are happy here?"

"Not happy!" corrected Nell. "I never shall be happy anywhere, but I am content to stop."

"Are you homesick?"

She shook her head.

"I don't think I am, only you see I had never been away from home before in my life, and sometimes I get a kind of longing on me to see a home face."

"Your parents miss you, I daresay!"

"Oh, no!" she assured him, "mamma can do quite well without me."

"And your father?"

"He is lost!"

"Lost!"

"I cannot bring myself to say he is dead. I have always clung to the hope of his return. It is very simple, very sad, only one day he went away, and we have never heard from him since."

"Is it long ago?"

"Fifteen years—I was a little child."

"You are not much more than a child now. And your brothers, do they share your hope?"

"I have no brothers, Sir Jocelyn, nothing but one sister."

"You are very young to come so far from home," he said, kindly. "I told my sister so the first time I saw you."

Nell looked at him imploringly.

"Don't send me back, Sir Jocelyn. Oh! please try me a little longer. I know quite enough to teach your little girls, and I shall be getting older every day."

"I shall never send you away," returned the Baronet, gravely. "I am very glad for you to be at Alandyke while you can be contented here."

He did not look like a man who had worried his wife into her grave; there was nothing in his face to show that a curse rested on him. Nell was beginning to treat the servant's words as tales, and she went to bed that night with a higher opinion of her employer than she had had before.

But alas! on the first night of her coming to Yorkshire she could not sleep. She tossed about on her pillow as restlessly as then. Twelve o'clock found her preternaturally wide awake, and then, to her horror, as the last chime died away, she heard those dreadful footsteps which had so troubled her before.

And again they went into the locked-up room. Poor Nell listened in vain for their departure; she lay in an agony of terror, listening for the sound of those footsteps, and at last she rose, and feeling her way to the door of communication, she could see the reflection of a light glimmering through the threshold.

Who could it be? It stood to reason that none of the servants would disturb a room held so sacred. It sounded to Nell like a chapter out of a novel. Here was a room locked up from year's end to year's end, and which no one was supposed to enter, and yet in six weeks' time she had twice heard its shady peace disturbed by nocturnal alarm.

"If I live till morning I will ask Lady Daryl for another bedroom," was the poor girl's decision.

The noise died away in time, a great hush fell over the house, but Nell was none the less resolved on her prayer. She wrote a very short

note to her ladyship, merely saying that she felt ill and nervous sleeping so far from anyone, and she should be obliged if she might occupy any other room, however small.

The answer was prompt and decided.

Lady Daryl was just preparing to receive a large party of guests, and it was quite impossible another room could be spared for Miss Stuart.

"How could you do it?" asked Bell, when she came in that evening; "there was quite a commotion at breakfast. Lady Daryl and my uncle almost quarrelled."

"But what about?"

"You!"

"How could they possibly quarrel about me?"

"I suppose they didn't quite know what to do with you. Lady Daryl insisted it was nothing but affected nonsense. Uncle declared we had no right to ask others to undertake what we ourselves would not."

Nell looked at her eagerly.

"Is there any history about that room, Bell? Do tell me. I have heard of haunted chambers in old houses. Is it possible there can be one here at Alandyke?"

"I don't know," said the pretty heiress, without her usual gaiety, "only since Aunt Alberta died no one has ever entered her boudoir. It has been kept shut up all these years, and—now, don't be frightened, Nell, but there have been several governesses here, not one of them would stay; they one and all refused to give a reason for their departure. It struck me to-day they might have been afraid of sleeping near a locked-up room, only they didn't like to say so."

"But why is it locked up?"

Bell shook her head.

"Lady Daryl said to day it was a thousand pities it was not thrown open. She declared it had the prettiest view of any apartment in the house. She told me she had asked my uncle to allow it to be refurnished and made into a spare room when she first came to live here."

"And did he refuse?"

"Yes; he told her that if she had any regard for her sister's memory, or the honour of their house, that room must be left as it was. Poor Lady Daryl—her face grew white as she told me."

Nell shuddered. She was naturally of a nervous, excitable temperament, and these weeks of loneliness had not tended to strengthen her courage.

"Do you think that Lady Leigh is dead?" she asked, in a terrified whisper. "Perhaps she is alive all the while, and Sir Jocelyn keeps her shut up there!"

Isabel stared. Then she burst out laughing.

"Why, you must be going mad to think of such a thing! My uncle couldn't plan such a crime; besides, how could he carry it out? Who would convey food to his captive? You may say yourself you have only heard the noises twice since you came here. A captive could not live long, Nell, if they were only supplied with food twice in five weeks!"

Helena blushed hotly.

"I beg your pardon, I—"

"You are a romantic, imaginative girl. Fancy making a Bluebeard of my poor dear uncle! But I'll forgive you on one condition."

"What is it?"

Bell hesitated.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes," thinking a little sadly of the one she had last kept, and all the misery it had brought her.

Bell put one arm round her friend's waist, and sat down affectionately beside her.

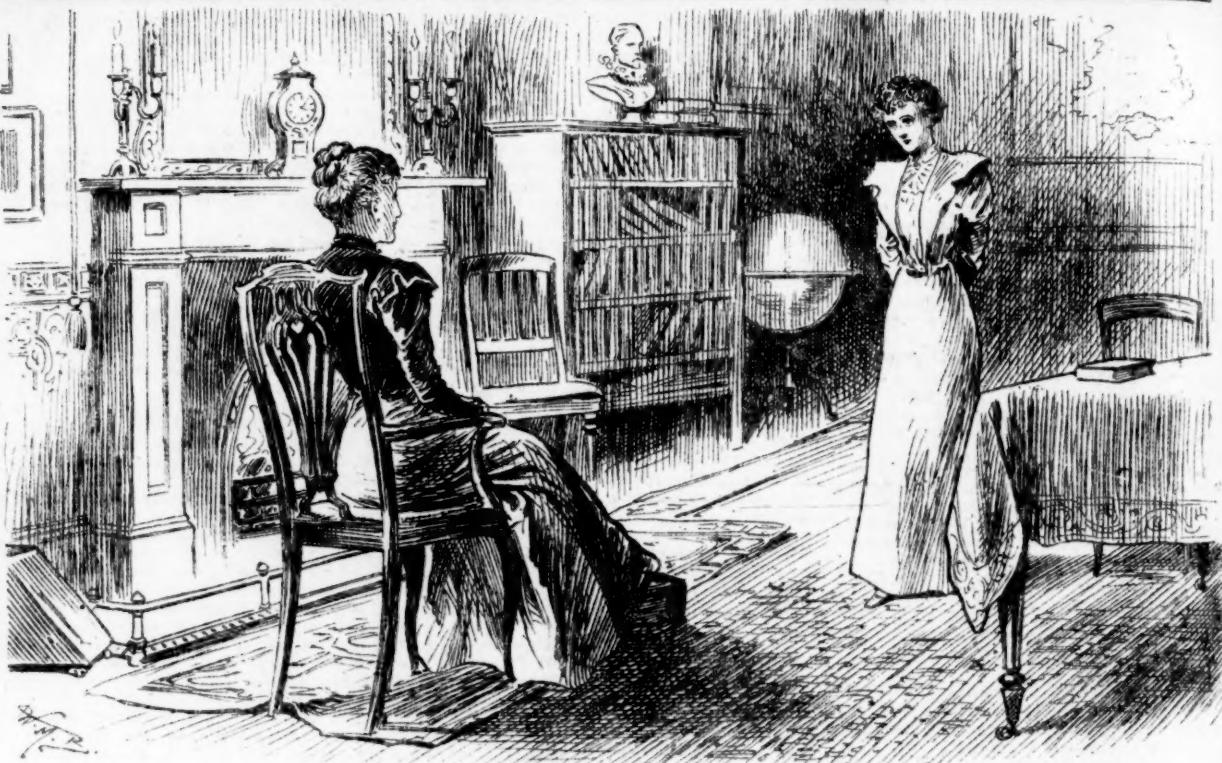
"A great many people are coming here to-morrow, Nell. The house will be quite full of visitors."

"Yes."

Miss Stuart did not in the least understand whether this conversation was leading.

"And Lady Daryl will be so busy she won't be able to look after me; and a friend of mine is coming."

"I don't know what you want!" said Helena, slowly. "I must be very stupid, Bell, for I don't understand in the very least."



"I AM THE CHILDREN'S COUSIN, ISABEL VERNON!" SAID NELL'S VISITOR

"I want nothing in the world except leave to come here as often as ever I like. Uncle is always delighted when I'm with the children. If Lady Daryl complains to you of my being here so often, I want you to promise me you will tell her you like me to come."

"Of course I will do that! I do like it. You brighten up the schoolroom like a ray of sun-shine."

They were sitting side by side—a striking contrast these two. One was Guy Vernon's plighted wife, the other his life's love; and yet it never came into Nell's head to be jealous of beautiful Isabel Vernon. Her eyes had been opened in time. She saw her hero for what he was—a weak, wavering man, ready to sacrifice his heart for money. Nell's only feeling for Guy Vernon now was quiet scorn. At times she even pitied the sweet, winsome creature who was to be his wife. A summons reached her from Lady Daryl the next day.

During the stay of the guests she was to appear in the drawing-room from four to six, to officiate at the tea-table, and to make herself otherwise useful. Nell would have given a great deal for power to disobey.

It was so hard to go among this brilliant crowd, to be among them, and yet not of them; but a governess may not consult her tastes; so equipped in the prettiest of her simple dresses, Miss Stuart went downstairs. She saw at a glance that nearly twenty people were present; no one spoke to her, and she made her way quietly to the tea-tray; then, as her fingers busied themselves with the silver and china, her eyes took in the whole scene.

Two or three stately dowagers conversing with Lady Daryl; a goodly sprinkling of men, both young and old; a few girls of stylish mien, and a widow dressed in the latest fashion, who cooed rather too openly with her host. It seemed to Nell that Sir Jocelyn was not enjoying himself particularly; he looked bored. His courtesy never failed, but his face was sterner and graver than it had been when he sat in the

schoolroom with his little girls; and he certainly gave Mrs. Rosseter no reason to think she was inducing him to contemplate matrimony for a second time.

Enter the butler; he made his way through the guests to his master's side, and spoke a few words in an undertone, which yet reached Helena Stuart's ear.

"A gentleman, sir; he will not give his name, but he says he was an old friend of Sir Kenneth."

"Show him up," said the master of Alandyke, heartily; "all my kinsman's friends are mine."

"Rather rash!" whispered the widow in his ear; "he may be a kind of genteel pauper, who hopes to trade upon his intimacy with your late cousin."

Sir Jocelyn laughed.

"I'm not afraid!" he said, bravely. "I am a Yorkshireman, Mrs. Rosseter, and my county is noted for its hospitality. I wouldn't turn the meanest beggar from my door on such a night as this!"

For the snow was coming down in heavy flakes, and already covered everything with a thick, white mantle. A traveller would have fared badly wandering on the Yorkshire hills.

There was a little pause among the company; a general impression prevailed that the new visitor would be something remarkable, and Nell found her eyes wandering towards the door. Only a few moments' delay, and the curiosity of everyone was gratified.

Then entered a tall, soldierly man, of middle-age, whose face had on it the stamp of nobility, one who moved as though accustomed to command. No need for such as he to produce credentials of respectability, his pedigree was written on his brow; he gave one glance round the room, and then saw Sir Jocelyn advance to meet him with outstretched hand.

"I should have known you anywhere, Lord Carruthers!" he said, with a genial smile, "though it is more than ten years since we met,

welcome, thrice welcome, to England, and to Alandyke."

The old soldier wrung his hand, as though pleased at the warmth of Sir Jocelyn's reception, and then he glanced at the fair girl clustered by the fire as he asked,—

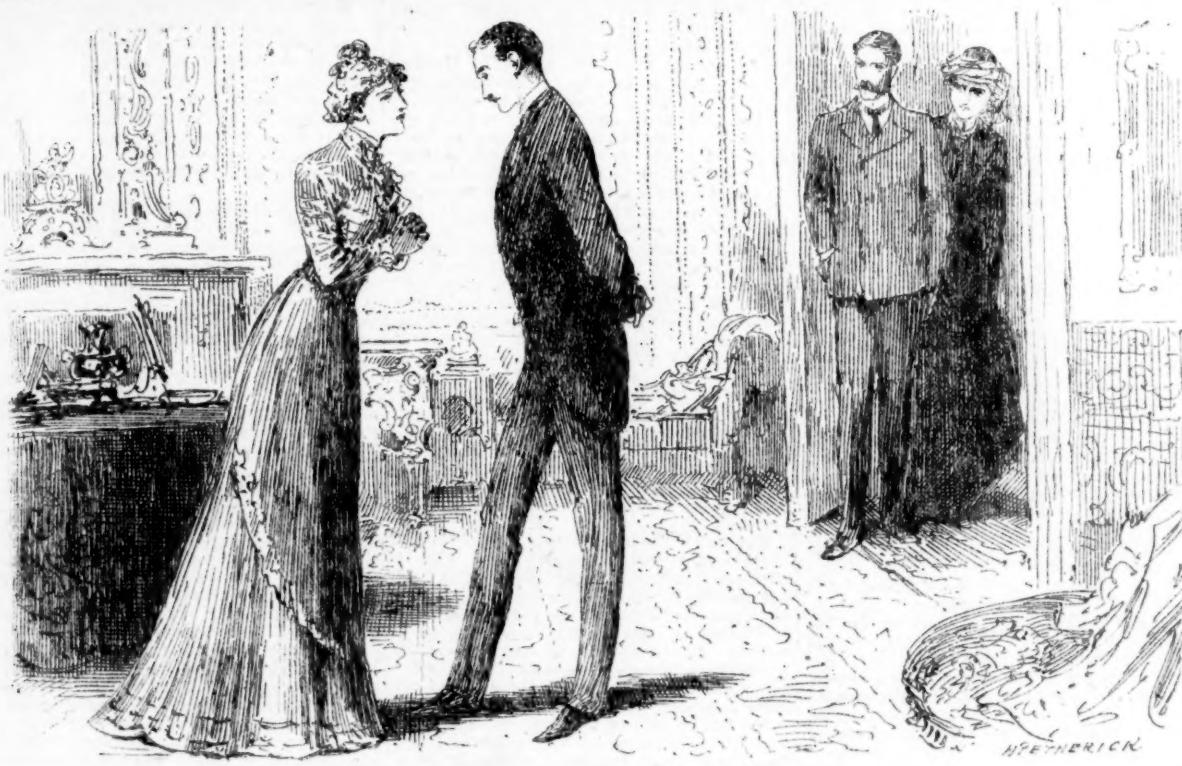
"And which of all these Hebes in my old friend's granddaughter? Sir Jocelyn, will you present me to your kinswoman, the mistress of Alandyke?"

(To be continued.)

THE number of soldiers slain in battle depends a great deal on the colour of their uniform. The more flashy and conspicuous the helmet and jacket, the better the target, and consequently the greater the mortality.

THE baled hay that is being shipped from New York for the use of the British army in South Africa and the American army in the Philippines is being compressed by a new process. The hay is put up in bales, cylindrical in form, about the size and shape of the old-fashioned nail-keg, or eighteen inches high and of the same diameter. The bales weigh about 145 lb.

THE wedding cake is the remains of a custom whereby a Roman bride held in her left hand three wheat ears, and many centuries later an English bride wore a chaplet of wheat. The bridesmaids threw grains of corn or small bits of cake upon the heads of the newly married, and the guests picked up the pieces and ate them. The wedding cake did not come into general use until the last century, and was then composed of solid blocks laid together, laid all over, so that when the outer crust was broken over the bride's head, the cakes inside fell on the floor and were distributed among the guests. Bridal favours are of Danish origin. The true-lover's knot was first designed by Danish hearts, and derived its designation from the Danish truelove—"I plight my troth."



FLORENCE DANE STOOD NEAR HIM AND WAITED FOR HIS ANSWER.

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

CHAPTER VIII.

No man ever loved his wife with a more tender love than Alan, Earl of Eisdale, bore to the girl who had once been Florence Warburton. The sleeping beauty he had discovered in the wood held his whole heart. She was his one object in life, and yet with the blindness of a man's nature he never understood that pain and suffering might come to his wife from the society of the woman who had once been his *fiancee*.

Alan had a true generous heart. When Sybil broke her old troth she killed his love for her at a blow. To him from that time forward she was nothing but his cousin's widow.

Never once did it occur to him that she and her mother-in-law might have indulged far different dreams.

So long as he was unmarried he shunned Lady Dane steadily, but when he had won the treasure of Florence Warburton's love, in the depth of his happiness he forgave even Sybil. He received her courteously at his house, he treated her as an honoured guest.

It never came into his head to fancy his idolised wife, whose felicity he would have purchased at any cost, could suffer from his generosity.

"What do you think of our guests, Floy?" he asked her, the first evening, when he came upstairs and found her in her dressing-room, her fair hair flowing over her shoulders.

"I like your aunt very much, she is so kind and gentle!"

"And Sybil?"

Every instinct of the girl's nature was against this beautiful, fascinating woman, but she shrank from saying no. She owed everything in the world to Alan, how could she speak against his *knowwoman*?

"Lady Dane is very lovely!"

Lord Eisdale smiled fondly.

"To some eyes perhaps. I prefer golden hair

to that ebony hue. Floy, do you like your home, dear? Do you think you can be happy here?"

"I like it very much! I could be happy anywhere with you!"

He stood bending over her, one hand caressing her golden head.

"My aunt will be a mother to you! It is so long since you had a mother, you poor, lonely little child!"

The tears were in her eyes. She longed to tell him everything, but something stronger than herself held her back.

In a very few days the Earl and Countess had settled down at the Manor. Florence was completely at home, and there was not the slightest reason for the Dowager and her daughter-in-law to linger, and yet they did linger.

Perhaps they found their present quarters too comfortable willingly to forsake them. Certainly they put the most liberal construction upon Lord Eisdale's invitation, and the peer in his easy, good nature made them welcome.

And to Florence their continual presence was a daily trial, an ever-present grief. She loved her husband fondly. She wanted him to herself. The dowager she really loved, and would gladly have kept always at the manor; but Lady Dane was a very different person.

Outwardly flattering and caressing in her manner to the young Countess, Sybil never missed an opportunity of wounding the sensitive nature so different from her own.

If Florence and her husband arranged to take a drive, Lady Dane was sure to appear ready dressed at the moment the carriage came round, and take it as a matter of course that she should accompany him, under pretence of sparing the young wife trouble. She assumed the authority that usually belongs to the mistress of a household—the servants appealed to her, the Earl himself consulted her.

"I am nothing but a plaything!" thought poor Florence, bitterly. "She is Alan's companion and confidante!"

And the Earl was so unconscious of his wife's feelings that he frequently congratulated himself on her having such a companion and assistant as Sybil.

He never saw the gathering shadow on the fair young brow—never noticed that while Lady Dane talked glibly to him on almost every subject Florence grew day by day graver and more silent.

Things came to a climax. One fair March day Alan, strolling into his wife's boudoir, found her in tears.

"Florence!" he cried, amazed, "what is the matter, my darling? Why are you crying?" But she buried her head on his shoulder. For some time she did not speak.

"What is it?" he repeated. "My dear, what are you grieving for?"

Even then she did not tell him all. She only said she was dull. He seemed always away from her.

"You foolish child!" and he stooped to kiss her. "You know I am happiest at your side! I am obliged to go about the estate sometimes. It has been a good deal neglected, and there is much to be done."

"Take me with you!" she whispered. "Oh, Alan, I get so tired of sitting all alone!"

"But you are not alone; there is Sybil!"

"Lady Dane is not you!" whispered the Countess.

"Well, will you ride with me to Audley End this afternoon; I want to see a farmer about a lease?"

She looked up into his face.

"Do you mean quite alone? Shall I have you all to myself?"

"Of course you will!"

Riding had always been a favourite pastime with the young Countess. She had been the boldest equestrienne of all the pupils at Connaught House, so she went upstairs after lunch with a light heart to prepare for her excursion.

She came down in ten minutes. Very young and childlike she looked, her silver-mounted riding whip held in her little gauntleted hand

but the smile on her lips died as she approached the terrace steps, for three horses stood waiting, and Lady Dane also, in an equestrienne's attire, stood talking with Alan.

Florence looked from one to the other, and forgot her usual gentleness.

" You promised to ride with me, Alan ! " she said, plaintively.

" He is quite ready ! " returned Lady Dane, equably.

" We shall have a lovely afternoon for our excursion ! "

" I think I shall stay at home," said the Countess.

" Stay at home ! " exclaimed Alan. " My dear child, the ride was your own idea ! "

" But I wanted to go with you ! " a very pronounced stress on the " you ."

Lady Dane laughed sarcastically.

" Clearly I had better stay at home. Why did you not give me a hint, Lord Elsdale, that my company was not required, instead of leaving me to learn it in such a very peculiar fashion ? "

Alan stood between the two women—his wife and the woman who had been his first love. His every sympathy was with Florence, but Sybil was his guest. He could not encourage rudeness to her.

" You will do no such thing ! " he said, decidedly. " Florence could not have meant your society would be unwelcome ! "

" I did mean it ! " said the Countess, fairly roused. " I meant just what I said ! "

" What a little savage ! " muttered the Viscountess between her teeth, not so low but that the Earl overheard the words.

" Then you were guilty of a flagrant piece of rudeness ! " he returned, coldly, addressing his wife. " However much of a child you may be, you must know a hostess ought never to speak so uncourteously to a guest ! "

Florence looked at him with flashing eyes, in which the tear-drops sparkled only too plainly, but she said nothing.

" She is only a child ! " said Lady Dane, pleasantly. " You must pardon a schoolgirl's *gaucherie*, Lord Elsdale."

" Madam," said the Countess, with a strange, new dignity, " I need no one to intercede for me to my husband ! "

She mounted the terrace steps, never once turning her head to look at the two she left there.

Lord Elsdale watched her with a longing, yearning expression in his dark eyes.

" You had better run after her ! " said Lady Dane, with icy politeness. " I can go indoors and take off my habit. It is clear I shall have no ride to-day. You would not dare to escort me after your wife's very plain expression of her sentiments ! "

Lord Elsdale could not bear the sneer. He was an intensely proud man. Not even for his wife's sake would he let it be said he " did not dare."

In perfect silence he handed Lady Dane in her saddle, and they rode off.

The Earl strained his eyes to his wife's windows, hoping to catch a last sight of her fair face, but none gladdened him.

For some time neither he nor his companion spoke; but his silence nettled her, and at last she said, pitifully,

" You are not a very lively escort, Lord Elsdale ! "

He started.

" I beg your pardon. I was thinking."

" Of your wife ! I wonder what I have done to make myself so distasteful to her ! "

" You are not really that. Lady Elsdale is little more than a child, and she is given to speak her mind plainly."

" So it seems. Wasn't it a pity you didn't send her to school for a year before you married her. No offence, only it might have spared you trouble."

" I am not afraid," said Alan, dryly, " and I think my wife has had schooling enough, since she spent fifteen years at one establishment."

" Really ! "

" Really. I often tell her she ought to be a very learned young lady."

" But hasn't she any relations ? "

" A father, but he was in India. He died there last year, and she went to live with an aunt near Westfield, that is how I found her."

Lady Dane listened with well-assumed interest; she cared nothing in the world about the Earl's courtship, unless she could learn from it something detrimental to his wife. The widow had conceived a hatred as bitter as it was wicked, as malignant as unjust for the fair young girl who had become Countess Elsdale.

Seeing the Earl day by day in familiar intercourse, had brought back to her too keenly the days when they were plighted lovers. She, alas ! had cared for him—*now*, cared for him still far more than she had ever done for the man she had married. He was kind and courteous to her now, ever ready to promote her pleasure, and she was blind enough to imagine that had he only been free he would have knelt to her again and sued for her hand.

Blinded by her vanity she could not see that Alan's kindness was that of Indifference. That he had forgotten their former relations sufficiently to bring her to his home as his young wife's guest showed this could she only have seen it.

She hated Florence because the girl stood between her and happiness; she accused Florence of robbing her of wealth, title, and the man she loved. Whereas her own falsehood of long ago had so robbed her; and if Florence Warburton had never been born, or being born, had never crossed Lord Elsdale's path, the results would have been just the same. When Sybil broke her troth with Alan Dane she broke it never to return.

She could not marry him now; she could not avenge the act which made Florence his wife and Countess of Elsdale; but surely she could cloud the young wife's felicity. Surely cunning words and covert insinuations would weaken Alan's satisfaction in his choice! Beautiful as an angel this cruel, vindictive woman had henceforward but one object—to wreck the happiness of Alan Dane, the man she loved, and the innocent girl she persisted in regarding as her rival.

It was easy to make the Earl tell her of affairs at Foxgrove, and how the Foxes had tried to make his darling a modern Cinderella; it was easy to lead him to speak of his aunt Emily's fondness for her, and how his cousin had served in the same regiment as her father, and been the first person to welcome her to Westfield. Sybil listened greedily, and before she reached the Manor she had learnt two things, that Alan was as ignorant as a stranger of his wife's family history, and also that he was possessed of a strange insane jealousy, dormant, it is true, yet ever present, of his cousin Cecil.

Sybil looked into his face as he described Captain Fane's meeting with Florence in the train.

" You have spoilt the story," she said, with a pretty smile. " According to all the rules of romance it should have been the captain who carried off the lovely princess from her cruel guardians."

" Ah ! " said Alan, a little triumphantly, " you see romance is not always to be depended on ; and then they turned their horses and galloped back to the Manor.

It seemed to Florence Warburton—we beg pardon, Lady Elsdale—that no moment of her life had been so bitter as that in which she saw her husband ride off at her enemy's side; for that Lady Dane was her enemy she felt very certain.

Young as she was she had already known bitter sorrow; but not even when in the summer sunshine they broke to her the news of her father's death, or, later on, when on a cold November night she learned her mother's miserable story, had she suffered as she suffered now.

" He is tired of me," she whispered sorrowfully, to herself. " Oh ! Alan, I knew I was far beneath you, a little uniformed schoolgirl; but I loved you, my darling, and I never thought that in less than four short months you could weary of my love."

She threw herself on the sofa in her boudoir and tried to think out the problem. If Alan loved Lady Dane why had he not married her ? If he really loved her (Florence), what had she done to weary him in so short a time ?

" I will go to him to-night," thought the young wife, sadly. " I will tell him my heart feels breaking, and ask him to send her away. We were happy before she came here; we should be happy again if only her cold, beautiful face were gone."

Her resolution was taken; she would dress for dinner and welcome her husband with smiles on his return, but she would tell him the truth plainly, her heart was breaking. When he heard that he would be merciful and send away the cold, scornful beauty whose presence had so troubled her.

She dressed quite early, a little scheme of meeting her husband on his return and being reconciled to him at once making her anxious to get her toilet over. Excitement had lent her cheeks a brilliant flush, and she looked a creature to take all hearts by storm.

She had hardly finished dressing when a servant came to her.

" Captain Fane has arrived, my lady; he is in the drawing-room."

Florence knew that her husband had casually invited the Captain to look in on them any time when he had a couple of days to dispose of. She had utterly forgotten that strange speech of Alan's denoting jealousy of Cecil, and she went down to receive her visitor with real pleasure beaming in her soft brown eyes.

It was well for Cecil that before his interests in her had ripened into love he learned she was another's. It was well, too, for him that since her marriage another face, far different from hers, was fast stealing into his heart. The brave young officer could meet his cousin's wife without a single pang; he gave to Florence a greeting as simple and as affectionate as he might have given to a sister.

" You see I have remembered Alan's invitation," he said, brightly. " Well, how do you like the Manor, my fair châtelaine ? "

But as he looked at her he saw the cloud which the excitement of welcoming him had banished again return to her brow, and he knew as well as though he had been told so by her own lips that things were going hardly with his old superior officer's daughter.

It was the thought of the brave old colonel who had been so good to him and whose very hope had centred in this girl, that made Cecil so anxious about Lady Elsdale's happiness. He knew that his cousin had made a love-match, that he had fairly worshipped his young bride; and now, after not four months of wedlock, he found that bride with tear-stains on her cheeks and eyes whose brightness was dimmed with weeping.

" Where is Alan ? " he asked, quickly.

" Alan is out riding."

" Don't you like riding ? You used to be fond of the open air ! "

" I am very fond of riding, but I did not care to go with them."

" You have visitors then ? "

" The Dowager Countess and her daughter-in-law are staying with us."

" Her daughter-in-law ! You don't mean Lady Dane ? "

" Yes ! Why, do you know her ? "

" I used to know her long ago ! "

" Did you quarrel with her ? " asked Lady Elsdale, with sudden interest. " Oh ! Captain Fane, do you like Lady Dane ? "

Cecil hesitated.

" I don't think I knew her well enough to like or dislike her. She behaved shamefully ! " he muttered, half to himself. " But, there, that is long ago ! "

" I don't like her," said Florence, slowly. " It may be very wrong of me, but I don't trust her. There is something cruel and treacherous in her eyes, beautiful though they are."

Cecil Fane took the girl's white hand in his. He knew a little of Lady Dane's character, and guessed the work she was trying to do at the Manor.

" My dear little cousin," he said, gravely, " I

quite understand what you mean ; but take my advice, and never let Lady Dane suspect your doubts of her ; she would revenge them terribly."

To his surprise the girl shivered even in the warm, cosy drawing-room.

"I am afraid of her," she answered, sadly. "I can't make Alan understand, but I feel as if she would do me some dreadful injury."

"She could not," cried Cecil, eagerly. "How could she injure you when you have Alan to protect you ? He knows her for what she really is."

"Alan likes her ; he is always telling me how much to pitied she is."

"It is very generous of him," and Cecil shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose he can afford to forgive her now."

"To forgive her ! Did she ever injure him ?"

The Captain paused in dismay. He had brought upon himself a question he could not, he dare not answer.

Florence Dane stood near him, her brown eyes fixed upon his face as though she were trying to read his very soul as she waited for his answer. Truly that was an unlucky moment for the return of the equestrian.

Lord Eisdale, hearing of Cecil's arrival, had come straight to the drawing-room. Lady Dane followed him in her habit. They were just in time to witness the appealing glance which the Countess fixed upon her visitor.

CHAPTER IX.

MAY had come with its long, bright days, its glad spring flowers and pleasant sunshine. London was full, for the season promised to be unusually brilliant one.

The West-end was crowded with rank and fashion, and at every ball and assembly the fair young Countess of Eisdale was the queen. She had been presented at Court directly after Easter. Royal lips had delighted to speak in praise of her sweet, artless loveliness, and she was the acknowledged belle of the season. And she was happy !

People said so. Artists who raved of her beauty said, it is true, that the impression of her face was full of pathos, but the general public declared that her felicity was perfect. Wife of one of the richest noblemen of the day, idolised by her husband, admired by all who knew her, surely, they argued, she had all that heart could wish for !

Only Cecil Fane, watching her with an affection as innocent as it was sincere, knew that there was a cloud upon the sky, that brilliant as was her fate, it was not the life she had dreamed of when she stood at the altar of the simple village church, and swore to be the wife of Alan Dane.

There had never been an open breach between the Earl and his wife. The storm threatened at the close of the last chapter never broke. It was averted by Cecil's tact.

Neither Florence nor her husband ever knew that the Dowager Countess departed for her own home suddenly only because Captain Fane had hinted to her that Lady Dane's presence marred the domestic happiness of her nephew.

Florence stood at her husband's side watching the carriage drive away, and when it was out of sight she turned to him with a little sigh of deep content.

"We have only each other now," she whispered.

But the Earl answered her with no caress. He was looking at her steadily, almost coldly.

"And do you think we shall be happier ?"

"Yes," she said, surprised. "It may be very foolish, dear, but I grudge you to our guests. I think I wanted all your time and attention for myself."

Alan caught his wife's two hands in his.

"Do you mean it, Florence ?"

"Of course I mean it, Alan."

He looked into her eyes.

"My darling, I may have misjudged you. I may have forgotten the years between us, but

I will never doubt you again, my sweet, if you will look into my face and tell me you have never deceived me."

A great lump came into her throat. How could she look into his face and tell him that, when she had deceived him for months on one all-important point ! when even now she was hiding from him that her mother toiled hard as a seamstress for daily bread.

She hesitated—she could not speak the lie.

Alan dropped her hands suddenly, and went into the house. He understood her silence, and from that moment their altered life began. He was never unkind to her. He studied her every wile, until the heart was gone out of his tenderness. It was as though he left her the empty case of his affections, while the jewel within of his trust and love had forsaken her.

They drove together to make calls, they appeared in company together, but at home Florence saw very little of her husband. He went his way, she hers. He never inquired as to her pursuits, never told her of his own. He gave her every title of honour due to his Countess—he gave her none of the tenderness his wife could expect.

And they went to London with this great unspoken gulf between them, which neither attempted to bridge over.

They plunged into the vortex of fashion. Alan went in for every gaiety that was the mode. He tried in a whirl to drown thought, and all the while, whatever he said or did, wherever he went or whoever he was with, but one face haunted him—the face of his own wife, the child he had found sleeping in the wood, who had once been so near to him and now was so far.

He never reproached her, never once. He treated her with the utmost kindness, the most deferential attention, only he never caressed her, he never willingly remained *tête-à-tête* with her.

He came into her boudoir one bright May morning to bring her some card of invitation which had been taken to him by mistake, and he almost started as he saw the fragile delicacy of her complexion, the wan, wistful expression of her face.

She was leaning back on a low, easy chair. She started as he entered, and two bright pink spots burned on her cheeks.

"How ill you look," he said, astonished at her wan, weary look.

"I am rather tired."

"Tired of pleasure ?"

The brown eyes filled with tears.

"You need not tell me I am nothing but a butterfly," she said, reproachfully. "Indeed, I know it well enough."

He sat down near her. It was the first time he had entered her boudoir since they came to London.

"My dear child," he said, with something of his old tenderness in his manner, "I am not approaching you. Youth is the time for enjoyment."

"I don't enjoy myself," she returned, abruptly.

"Don't you ? I thought you had rather a gay time, Florence ?"

"And I hate it."

"You hate it ?"

"Yes, these balls and parties and crowds of people I don't care for ; I hate them all."

"Then why go to them ?"

"One must do something."

He looked at her sorrowfully.

"You are young to say that."

"I feel old enough. Oh, Lord Eisdale, sometimes I can't believe that only one little year ago I was a happy girl at school."

"Which means you are not happy now."

She did not contradict him.

"Florence," and his voice was husky with emotion, "Heaven knows I am not blaming you. We have made a great mistake, dear, and I am most to blame because I was so much older. I ought to have known better."

She waited a moment.

"Could we undo it ?"

"Undo what ?"

"Our marriage. That is the mistake you mean."

"Has it come to that ? Do you really wish our marriage undone ?"

"I thought you wished it."

He was silent. Then he laid one hand gently upon her head.

"My dear, you don't know what you are talking of. You are my wife—nothing in the world can alter that."

She did not answer, but he knew she was crying.

"Would you like to ask any of your friends to stay with you ?"

"No."

"One of your cousins—you used to like Pussy ?"

"No."

"Why not ?"

"Do you think I could bear for them to see how we live ? No, Lord Eisdale, we will keep our misery to ourselves, please."

She had learned his secret. She knew quite well that Lady Dane had been his fair, false love of other days, and she believed, poor child, that had he only met Sybil again before he married her his heart would have been faithful to its first choice. There was the cause of her misery, and he—he believed the secret she had confessed to keeping from him was that of her love for his cousin Cecil.

Truly these two were at cross purposes. Each loved the other better than life itself, and yet neither had that perfect trust, that entire faith which would have pierced the cloud dividing them.

He went out ; they had been nearer an understanding than ever before since the fatal day when they stood together on the terrace steps at the Manor ; but it had failed, and the attempt at a reunion had but left them farther apart.

Florence sat on alone, her sad thoughts for company, when a servant brought in a little note.

"It came by hand, my lady, there is no answer."

At first the Countess imagined it was a bill, and let it be disregarded on the table ; then the thought it might be important, and opened it. She found within the envelope a single half-sheet of thin white writing paper, one side of which was covered in a clear, delicate hand.

"I am very ill—it may be dying—my darling ; if you have any tenderness for your mother, and you can come to me without exciting your husband's suspicions, let me see you once more. It seems to me the very sound of your voice will soothe my pain."

A strange light came into the girl's eyes. She had never forgotten her mother. Again and again she had longed to go and pour out her troubles on that mother's bosom, but she was powerless, for she did not know the address where the sorrowful, lonely woman lived, nor yet the name by which she was known. Now the knowledge had come to her, and she was determined to use it at once. She had not the clearest idea where Caroline-street was situated, but no doubt she could find out.

She went upstairs at once, and dressed herself in the plainest costume she could find, and went to the hall, but she had yet to learn that people possessed of numerous servants are apt to have a difficulty in accomplishing any expedition the least out of the common.

The butler looked amazed as he beheld his mistress.

"The carriage is not round, my lady."

"I know, Simmonds ; I am not going far, I can walk."

"Shall I call Marie, my lady ?"

Evidently, in Simmonds' eyes, his mistress was not fit to take care of herself.

"No," returned Lady Eisdale, shortly ; "I am going to make a call, I shall not be long."

He made no further suggestion, and finally condescended to open the door for her ladyship, but he did it with an air of protest, as though reminding his mistress that he entirely washed his hands of the responsibility of her rashness.

Poor Florence !

It seemed such an easy thing to take a cab and

call anywhere she pleased, but she had never in her life before found herself alone, on foot, in the London streets, and she had not the slightest idea which was the way to the nearest cab-stand, add to which that she was very beautiful—that her dress, simple though it was, had a certain recherche air which made it quite evident to anyone that she was one of the upper ten thousand—and you will have a little idea of her difficulties.

The first person she met was Lady Dane—Lady Dane attended by an elderly woman, half-maid, half-companion. The Viscountess stopped, and detained her kinswoman some minutes in conversation. Florence certainly liked her no better than she had done at the Manor, but she was older, and more worldly-wise, she never now openly showed her aversion.

"And where are you going?" asked Sybil; "I think it's the first time I ever saw you out alone."

"I am not fond of going out alone, but it is necessary sometimes."

"Is it? with a devoted husband, and three or four carriages at your service?"

Florence got away at last. The next turn of the road brought her to her desired object. It was some minutes before she had screwed up her courage to speak to a cabman. Fortunately she selected a very respectable Jehu of fatherly airs and benevolent mien.

"Caroline-street? Yes, miss. Do you mean Caroline-street, Pimlico? Caroline-street, Strand? or Caroline-street, W.C.?"

Florence did not know, and said so. The man shook his head, doubtfully, and the girl was at her wit's end, when footsteps sounded behind them, and looking up, she saw the pleasant face and broad shoulders of Cecil Fane.

"Are you in a difficulty?" he asked, cordially, "I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you here."

"Yes; I want to go to Caroline-street, and I can't explain it."

"Oh! you mean Caroline-street, West Central," said Cecil, when she had told him all she knew of her destination; "may I see you there? I have an hour or two to spare, and I don't like the idea of your going alone."

"Thank you." Then, as they drove off—"Captain Fane, is it very wrong for a lady to go out alone in London?"

"It is not wrong, but I wouldn't do it too often if I were you."

She blushed.

"I have just met Lady Dane, and she looked horrified."

"I wish you had not met her, Florence," his voice grew grave; "another time when you want to go so far from home take your own carriage or bring your man."

She looked at him wistfully.

"I couldn't. I am going to see someone who is very ill."

Cecil smiled.

"Do you know, for the moment I was terribly frightened! I thought you had got into some money difficulty."

"Money difficulty! Why, Alan gives me more than I can spend."

And this is a visit of mercy. Florence, I know you mean it well, only another time you must not go alone. I can't tell you what a dreary place Caroline-street is, or how I should regret your being there alone."

They were driving very quickly—so quickly that Florence never noticed her husband standing at a corner of Oxford-street waiting to cross the road—she did not know that he had seen her, and, also, what matters more, her companion; she knew nothing except that she was going to her mother—the mother who loved her so dearly, and who was so unhappy, and whose existence had caused the first secret between her and Alan.

The cab stopped at last, and she turned to Cecil with a little cry.

"It can't be here—oh! tell me they have made a mistake—while I live in luxury she can't be here!"

(To be continued.)

JOHN REEVE'S INHERITANCE.

—:—

(Continued from page 488.)

He had fallen in love with her when he had seen her lying helpless on the yellow sand, and now, in the pride of her strength and beauty he loved her all the more.

"It is pleasing to hear you say so," she said, in a chilling voice. And then she added, with a scornful look at him, "I don't think you caught my name when we were introduced!"

"No; I did not."

"My name is Ada Ansdell," she replied; "and now you understand my reason for hating you!"

"You are very cruel to say such a thing!" said John Reeve. "It is not my fault that the will can't be found!"

"Perhaps I am ungenerous, but I can't help my nature," said Ada Ansdell; "but my opinion of you can make no difference. Our positions are so different!"

"Are you going to accompany your friend, Mrs. Armstrong, abroad?" asked John.

"Oh, my life does not lie in such pleasant places!" testily.

"Let me hope your life isn't wholly miserable!" he returned.

How bitterly he regretted having taken the property. But how could he tell that the Ada he had rescued and Ada Ansdell was the same person?

"I am foolish to complain of my fate to a stranger!" said Ada Ansdell, recollecting herself, and her face flushing scarlet, "and I can do without your pity!"

"It was very ill-bred of me, no doubt!" said John Reeve, half apologetically. "And now that I have met you, there must be some purpose in it. Will you allow me to continue the acquaintance?"

"Spare yourself any further trouble, Mr. Reeve," she replied. "Our paths lie apart. I am only a poor governess, while you are a man of wealth and leisure."

"If you think I have learnt to despise honest labour you are mistaken, Miss Ansdell. Why, another turn might send me back to the desk, where I have worked for years. The will, the lost will, may come to light."

"If you find it, put it in the fire!" was her answer. "You do not look like a man who would bear poverty well."

He stood before her, proud, manly, and honourable, and compelled her, by some strange force that he possessed, to raise her eyes.

"Do you think me a coward?" he asked.

"No—no!" she replied, with a strange, little sigh; and then she added, "it will never happen. Dead wills only come to light in novels; but what would you do if you were to come across it?"

"You ask me, and the other claimant a woman, and that woman you?" said John Reeve. "I must see you again. Tell me where and when?"

"I will not allow it!"

"Thursday—at what hour?" he cried, still detaining her. "I'll not let you go till you tell me!"

"Mrs. Armstrong is beckoning to me."

"Say you will see me!" seeing his advantage.

"At three, then," she said, eager to get away. She was really frightened that his ardour would attract universal attention.

Well satisfied at his success so far, John Reeve left the house with Mr. Bell, who gave vent to a low chuckle more than once.

When Thursday came he went to the house in Bloomsbury, and inquired for Ada Ansdell.

He was shown up into the drawing-room, where he had to wait a long time before Ada made her appearance; but she was so coldly polite that he hardly knew what to do. Summoning all his courage, he again begged her to let him continue the acquaintance.

"I will be frank with you, Mr. Reeve," said Ada, while a vivid colour came over her face. "At present, I am only a governess, and I have

no opportunity of receiving visitors. There are plenty of other ladies in your own position who will be glad to entertain you."

John Reeve walked up and down the room in agitation.

"All I ask at present is that I may write to you."

She held up her hand with a gesture that stopped him at once.

"I insist that all shall end here. If you are a gentleman, you will not persecute me."

He glanced at her steadily until her eyes wavered, and her cheeks flushed and paled.

"You may think better some time of a man's honourable intentions," he said, gravely. "I cannot tell you why, but I feel assured that we shall meet again. I shall go on in the hope."

She did not yield in the slightest degree.

He bade her a lingering adieu, and after he had left the room she covered her face with her hands. Why had she allowed herself to fall in love with a man she ought to hate? She was almost angry with herself.

John Reeve felt almost like a thief after his interview with Miss Ansdell. He was grieved that she should have to work for a living, while he lived in wealth and luxury.

He at once made up his mind to go straight down to the Hall, and make a minute search after the will. The house should be pulled down brick by brick until he came upon the precious document. She should have the property in spite of herself, and he would go back to the desk.

He was a man of sudden impulse, and no sooner did he make up his mind than he set about his task, and in a very short time, to everyone's surprise, the Hall was full of workmen again.

Any person finding the will was to have one hundred pounds for his trouble, so it may easily be guessed that they kept their eyes open.

John Reeve was the most active in the search, and people said that he must be mad to try and disinherit himself. The old lawyer, Mr. Bell, was the only person who approved of his proceedings, but he did not deny to the young man that he thought the search would be a fruitless one.

Of course it would be a great act of self-sacrifice to give up wealth, and return to the drudgery of the office, but John had learnt to love Ada, and wished her to have a happy life.

A box was found at last in an out-of-the-way corner, and the fortunate workman who had discovered it came to John Reeve trembling with excitement, for he was just as eager to find the will as the young man. A curious feeling came over John.

He was convinced that the box contained the will, and for one moment he was almost sorry that it had been found, but then he thought of Ada, and the selfish feeling vanished from his mind.

With the assistance of the workmen he lifted the lid of the box, and there was the identical document which had the power of depriving him of his wealth.

Mr. Bell recognised it at once, even before it was opened, and could not refrain from giving a cry of satisfaction.

Ada Ansdell would now be her own mistress, and would never have to work for her living again. When his first feeling of delight was over Mr. Bell was really sorry for the young man, and told him so.

"Only you are a man, and more fitted to fight the world than her!"

"I agree with you there!" replied John Reeve, opening his hand; "but I wish that the will had never been lost, and then I should not have known the great contrast between wealth and poverty. We must start for London at once."

When he went to his new lawyer he, of course, advised him to contest the will.

"If you do not make a stand," said Mr. Richmond, "you deserve to lose the fortune, that is all!"

Would the woman whom he loved consider him any nearer her level when she heard of the

discovery of the will? He would go and see Ada once again.

Miss Andell came into the room with a frown upon her face. She did not really feel angry at his appearance, however.

"Mr. Reefs!" she said, in surprise, drawing herself up to her full height. "You must have understood that I told you not to come again!"

"I have found the will, and you are the heiress!" replied John; "and that is the reason I am here!"

Ada Andell seemed to be lost in thought as she held the document in her hand. John fidgeted about, spoke once or twice, but the girl made no reply.

Then she went out of the room, leaving him quite hurt, confused and humiliated. She might at least have thanked him for the sacrifice he had made.

He waited some time, hoping that she would return. Perhaps in her first joy at the recovery of the will she had forgotten his presence. He was about to leave, after waiting some time, when she entered the room once more with a tray in her hand containing ashes.

"What have you done?" he asked.

"I have destroyed this unjust will!" returned Ada. "Mrs. Sargeant had no right to make it. If she had left me a few hundred pounds I might have accepted it. You shall keep your aunt's money!"

John Reefs came nearer—a crimson light came into his eyes, and he fairly trembled. There was deep gratitude in his face as their hands met, and then he whispered in her ear,—

"Ada, dearest, I love you. Can you—will you—be my wife?"

She looked at him for a moment; and, reading her answer in her eyes, he stooped down and kissed her.

[THE END.]

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESSERT.

—:-

CHAPTER XX.

THE PRESIDENT'S BALL.

"WELL!" said Lord Marshall, eagerly, as he threw away his cigar. "Have you had any luck?"

"None at all," answered the Marquis promptly, and as he felt with strict veracity. "I begin to think we are a couple of fools."

"So do I; let us go home," said the Viscount, thoroughly tired of his detective-work—and home they went.

"Shall I ever be able to meet her as if nothing had happened?" the Marquis asked himself more than once, as he studied his rather plain face with more attention than usual, and discovered that it looked fibby about the cheeks, and heavy about the eyes. He smiled grimly, as he saw Phillips, his valet, contemplating him with surprise, and had no doubt "the fellow" thought his master was growing conceited.

The ball that night was a great success, for half the fashionable world of Paris was there, and a good many distinguished foreigners had been invited by the President.

There were the most exquisite dresses that Worth could devise, and pretty faces to do honour to elegant toilettes; brilliant uniforms, and orders by the hundred—diamonds flashing—with sparkling—and bright eyes shining; bands that made the hearts of young and old beat faster, floors that seemed to invite eager feet to fly, and flowers sufficient to have filled a score of Covent gardens.

Lady Valerie De Montfort looked very well that night, and the exitable Frenchmen bowed down before her beauty as if she were a goddess.

The Marquis of Daintree felt his cheek pale with emotion. She had his roses in her well-gloved hand, and her eyes had sought his with a grateful smile the moment she entered the room, and yet he leant against the wall, and checked his first impulse to hurry forward.

"What has come over you?" asked Lord Marshall excitedly; "I'd have given a thousand pounds for that look she gave you."

"Much good it would have done you," with a sardonic smile.

"How you do harp upon that!" he exclaimed testily; "as if I were the only married man in the world."

"Pon my word, I had forgotten Lady M. as much as you had; but what's the worth of a woman's smile when you can't bottle it up, and keep it to yourself?"

"Oh, if that's your line of thought I only hope you won't get another," and the Viscount moved off to see what his reception would be.

Daintree followed, although he felt as if he would rather stay away; and as he shook hands and heard her sweet voice thanking him, and telling him that the roses from Belton were finer and infinitely nicer than those in her former bouquets, he almost thought he must have dreamt that meeting or parting—which was it?—in the church porch.

There was an eager look in her eyes, a deeper flush than usual on her cheeks, but the face was as frank as ever, and surely the innocence had not vanished!

Later on in the evening they danced together, that is to say, they took a turn or two, and lounged against first one wall, and then another, after the fashion of our compatriots. In spite of the size of the rooms they were much crowded, and the ladies were complaining bitterly of their torn dresses, whilst the gentlemen remarked to each other that they were sure, whatever the colour of the outside uniform might be, the inside was black and blue.

"Why do you look at me like that?" asked Valerie, with embarrassing directness, after a long pause, during which her partner seemed to have been lost in thought.

"Why! What do you mean?" taken aback.

"Your eyes had a sort of pitying look in them as if I were a lamb on the way to slaughter. Is anything dreadful going to happen to me?" with a smile.

"Heaven forbid," with sudden seriousness.

The careless smile vanished from her lips, a startled look came to her eyes, she lowered her voice to a whisper.

"You know something—tell me, it would be much kinder."

He stopped a moment thinking.

"What could I know, Lady Valerie?" he said slowly.

"How can I tell?" in great agitation. "Don't keep me in suspense. Has anything happened to—to—?"

Of course she was alluding to that handsome fellow she had parted from that evening in the dusk. She loved him, that was very evident, or else she would not be so frightened about him—a woman was always nervous about the safety of anyone who was dear to her.

He determined to draw the truth out of her if he could, but he knew that he was a clumsy hand at that sort of thing, and had no confidence in his own powers.

"To your father? He was in close confab with the President just now, and I saw nothing dangerous about them."

"You are playing with me," she said impatiently. "Of course papa is all right. I was not thinking of him."

"You might save time if you would tell me whom you were thinking of," very slowly, with his eyes fixed on the crimson flush that instantly dyed her cheeks.

"Why should you tease me? You have heard something—I never knew you cruel before," her chest heaving.

"Heaven knows I would be of service to you if I could," his voice grave and sad. "I have nothing to tell you that you don't know already; but I'm an old friend"—growing confused, "and I know you'll hate me."

She looked up at him with expectant eyes.

"Not likely."

"If you have a secret tell it to your father, or some man you can trust."

He paused, then braced himself up, and went on hurriedly. "You are young, and know

nothing; but secrets like yours play the dance with a girl's reputation."

He was very red in the face by the time he had ended, and almost held his breath, expecting to be annihilated by an indignant flush, but none came. The small head drooped, one hand played nervously with the roses in her bouquet. There was a long pause, and then she said, faintly,—

"Take me out of this crowd—I am suffocating."

He gave her his arm, and feeling as if he had been a brute or a savage, led her away hastily into a smaller reception-room, now deserted, as hundreds of the guests were pouring through every open door into the supper-room.

She sank down on a sofa with a sigh of relief, as if weary in body as well as mind, her lips trembling, her lashes resting on her white cheeks.

The Marquis's heart bled for her. Who was he that he should judge her? No saint assuredly, and yet he could not bear that this girl should not be entirely faultless. He was not much better than other men, but he had a high standard for women which few could reach, and till this afternoon he fancied that Valerie De Montfort had surpassed it.

Would she explain it away!—tell him after the fashion of so many romances that the suspected lover was a brother whom the world knew nothing of, and claim his help for the unfortunate wretch? But the man whom he had seen on the church-step looked the very reverse of an unfortunate wretch, with his thoroughbreds waiting round the corner. Finding that theory would not hold water he decided that he was a designing villain, who had got a hold on this innocent girl through no fault of her own, and would lead her into trouble, if not worse than that.

"Tell me the scoundrel's name!" he broke out impulsively, "and I'll undertake to smash his head."

She gave him one look of horrified astonishment, then began to shake from head to foot, clasping her hands together, as if in anguish of mind. A dreadful fear came over him, and his own cheek was white, as he sat down by her side.

"Lady Valerie, what is it?"

"Nothing—nothing that you can cure," she gasped—"only if you ever cared a bit for me, prove it by holding your tongue."

"I will. You can depend on me;" and she knew that the Marquis of Daintree's promise was as good as an oath.

"Thank you; you are a true friend. I knew I could trust you," stretching out a hand, which he took in his, and raised reverently to his lips. "But what will you think of me?" looking up into his honest face with the simplicity of a child. "I don't want you to think badly of me."

"I couldn't," in a choked voice. "Oh, Valerie, listen, dear! You mayn't mean any harm, but you don't know what you may be drawn into. If the man were honest he would bite his tongue off before he proposed an assignation in a church. He would watch over you, and not tempt you; he would care for your honour as for his own hopes of salvation. But on the face of it this fellow's a blackguard—a thorough-paced scoundrel—and, mark my words, if you don't cast him off, and send him about his business, you will rue it to your dying day, and cover your father's ancient name with shame. You think I know nothing about it, but I do. I knew the world before you were out of your cradle. I know what men are, and what becomes of the girls who trust them too far; and rather than see you sink as other women have sunk and gone under, I could find it in my heart to kill you—yes, to kill you, in spite of your lovely face, and the love that is driving me wild!"

"Hush! don't talk like that!" a quiver of pain passing over her features.

"But I must," hoarsely, carried out of his usual phlegmatic self by the violence of his feelings. "It is Heaven's truth, and I'm resolved you shall know it."

There was a long pause, whilst from the distant ball-room came a strain of pathetic music, the cadence of a waltz by Strauss.

"He thought she was hopelessly offended, and had just made up his mind to leave her there, and send Lord Marshall to fetch her away, when she looked up at him, tears shining in her beautiful eyes."

"I shall never forget this, Daintree. Be my friend, and I shall have nothing to fear."

With a suppressed cry of delight he caught her little hands in his huge ones, and kissed them passionately.

"Your friend till death!" and at that moment he was so carried away by his enthusiasm, that he would gladly have laid down his life for her, without an instant's hesitation, if he could by that means have secured the happiness of her future, and averted the misfortunes which his practised eye foresew.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ENGLISH ROSE.

"Your daughter has been the star of the evening, milord," said the President's wife, as the Earl came up to make a parting speech. "She has thrown all our native beauties into the shade."

"There is no shade where Madame G. lives," and he bowed over her proffered hand.

"Really that Englishman pays pretty speeches as well as any Frenchman," turning to a friend, with a pleased smile.

"No wonder; his daughter's fair face is enough to inspire him. Is it true that she is going to marry the Marquis?"

"No, I saw her yawn when she was dancing with him."

"That is no evidence against the marriage—that is to say, it would not be with us. I know one man who fell asleep when his contract was being signed."

"Yourself probably? But then you can sleep through a thunderstorm."

"Yes, and, better still, I can go fast asleep when my wife is scolding. Where is Perpignan now?"

"I don't know, but his *fidus Achates* is over here, so I don't suppose he can be far off."

"Ah! I wonder what mischief is brewing?" with his finger to the side of his nose.

"Some say it's the little English girl," dropping her voice to a mysterious whisper; "but I hope it is a false report."

"What's the evidence—stronger than the yawn?"

"They sat in Perpignan's box at the opera—and everybody knows that it's left in his hands. And then Fanchette tells me that every day of the week he sends a lovely bouquet to the hotel where they are staying."

"And how does Fanchette know?" with the air of a sceptic."

"Because she is going to marry Antoine Marot, one of the waiters."

"Well, it may be true. I can't say, but if it ever comes off it will give the gossip something to talk about—virtue and vice, simplicity and intrigue, &c. Hasn't the girl got eyes to see it all written on his cursed face?"

He turned away without waiting for an answer, and mixed with the crowd, who made way respectfully for him because he was a grandee, and laughed at him behind his back, because the Parisians are given to ridicule.

"Ah! Darrell, you here! I only just arrived? I imagine that you have missed the very persons you came to see."

"Not at all, monsieur," said the Englishman, haughtily, "I have come to speak a few words to the President, and he is scarcely likely to retire before his guests are considerate enough to leave him in peace."

"This is no time for business; put your cares into your pocket, and ask the prettiest girl you can find to dance."

"The prettiest has gone; I met her on the steps, and dancing has no temptations for me."

"Then pray dance, and the rest of the world will be safe, at least for a quarter of an hour."

The Colonel looked down his aristocratic nose with a haughty stare.

"May I ask your meaning?"

"Better not," with a shrug of his shoulders. "I talk nonsense generally when I'm not at work."

"Fortunate that you are known to be one of the busiest men in Paris, or your wit would be too much for us."

"Au revoir, Colonel; I remember that my work will be waiting for me if I don't make haste home."

The two men parted, each with a consciousness of secret enmity, for which neither perhaps could have given a sufficient reason.

Colonel Darrell made his way to the President without any great difficulty, but he found that it was utterly impossible to get a minute's private conversation with him, whilst his hand was being shaken off in passing greetings by all those who considered themselves entitled to the privilege.

He swore beneath his black moustache, but that did no good at all; the stream of humanity in gorgeous array still went on, and left him waiting on the brink. Apparently his affairs were of great importance, at least to himself, for a dark frown settled on his face, and he began to gnaw his underlip, as he usually did when nearly wild with impatience.

At last he gave it up as hopeless, and walking away, sauntered through the rooms, chatting with any friends whom he happened to come across.

He presently espied a yellow rosebud lying forgotten on the carpet. Some instinct made him stop and pick it up. A young Viscount Duchâtel, who knew him well, touched him on the arm.

"Give it to me. It is of no value to you, but I shall treasure it like a jewel!"

"Then you know who dropped it?" with a satirical smile.

"Yes, the English girl, whom everybody is raving about. She had them in her bouquet, and though I asked for one, and nearly knelt on the floor, she would not give it me."

"You don't mean Lady Valerie?"

"Who else? Is there anyone in Paris to compare with her?"

"But I think you are mistaken; her bouquet was of lilies."

"It was of roses, and they came from some place in England. That little fat English milord gave them to her."

"There is no mistake—you are quite sure?" looking at him intently.

"As sure as that I stand here," impatiently.

"So give me the rosebud."

"Not I," holding it out of reach; "if it belongs to her it belongs to me."

"To you!" looking bewildered; "I had no idea—"

"You never have," with cold contempt.

"Listen, but don't prate about it all over Paris. As sure as your name is Duchâtel, and mine Darrell, Valerie de Montfort will one day be my wife."

The Frenchman stared at him open-mouthed, but a broad-shouldered Englishman, who had overheard the last words accidentally, said, in a low voice,—

"I am much obliged to you for the information, though I venture to doubt its accuracy."

Colonel Darrell started as if he had been stung, but when he turned to identify the speaker he was already lost in the crowd. Duval had also moved off, having been beckoned away by a friend, so he had no resource but to watch everyone who was leaving the large ball-room, or to go home with his curiosity unsatisfied. As the former was a tedious process, which did not suit his fiery, impatient disposition, he chose the latter alternative.

He reached his sumptuous lodgings in a bad temper, and asked the sleepy porter who opened the door if there were any telegrams for him in such a gruff voice that the man uttered his negative laconically, and slunk out of his way.

"That fool Zebdee, what good is he doing at Vian... I sha'nt like to know!" he grumbled.

savagely, as he hurried over his letters with a hasty hand. "Does he think I've paid his journey in order that he may watch over Verreker's safety? Ah! what's this?" running his eye over a page of almost illegible writing—"broken his arm—bad luck to him, he's always doing himself a damage—despatches arrived last night—knows where he keeps them. Good, that's better—Verreker will be a lost man—bravo, little Zebdee—I never knew you fall me yet," and his eyes glittered with satisfaction. "I should like to see the proud old Earl giving his daughter to a disgraced man!"

He locked his papers in his desk, and lighting a cigarette leaned back in his arm-chair to enjoy his meditations.

They were evidently agreeable to him, for the expression of his rather rigid features softened, and a smile hovered about his lips.

Presently he drew the yellow rosebud out of his pocket, and looked at it fondly, apostrophising the girl to whom it had once belonged as he pressed the faded flower to his lips.

"Poor little thing! You are as frightened as a bird in a snare, but you can't escape. Love is the only influence that is strong enough to fight against mine, and with Verreker tied by the leg, there will be no one to save you from me. You will like it well enough after a time, for no woman has ever resisted me."

Then he pulled out a telegraphic form, and filled it in, in readiness for the morning, telling Zebdee to be as careful as he could with his intended operations, and promising a magnificent reward. All this was expressed in a cypher intelligible to no one but the man to whom it was addressed, and he shut the missive up in an envelope, with a pleased smile, knowing that it was calculated to destroy the happiness of two people, and to secure his own!

CHAPTER XXII.

OVERSHOOTING THE MARK.

MISS SPRINGOLD had not improved in personal appearance during the last few months. Her fair colourless beauty wanted animation to brighten it, and softness to give it a charm, and both were wanting.

Her father began to notice the change in her, and set his brains to work to find out the reason.

Like many other men he had a confidence in his own powers of discernment which they didn't deserve, and having considered the case from his own point of view exclusively, he came to the conclusion that she must be in love.

It was rather absurd, after the pangs she had made others feel in a continued train, to think she should succumb to the tender passion herself, but the Colonel decided that she had lost her heart, and in want of any other particularly eligible object fixed upon the Marquis of Daintree.

He had returned to Belton Castle for the pheasant shooting only the week before, so it was natural to send him an invitation to dinner, as a sort of welcome home.

If he accepted it the Colonel made up his mind to leave the two together as much as he could, but, unfortunately, he would have to ask other guests to meet him.

The Earl of Beaufort had come back from his foreign tour, but had only spent a few days at his home when he started for Yorkshire with his daughter; so that he would not be able to join the party.

After all, perhaps that was as well, for according to the accounts which had reached Hampshire of Lady Valerie's success in Paris, she might prove a dangerous rival to Flossie.

Miss Springold was decidedly of opinion that she was better out of the way, for she had a little plan in her head which Valerie's clear eyes would be certain to demolish, and she knew that it was easier to pick a girl's character to pieces behind her back than if she were there to look on at the process.

Many of the principal people of the county came to Scarsdale on that Thursday evening,

for Colonel Springold was popular with the ladies, and his coquettish little daughter with the men.

Flossie dressed herself in a lovely costume of pale blue, which was to astonish the natives.

"My little girl doesn't look half bad!" said the Colonel admiringly, as they stood together on the hearthrug in front of the drawing-room fire, and he raised her face gently, and kissed it very carefully on the smooth white forehead. "Does she mean to wear a coronet before the year is out?"

"I don't know," with a toss of the head, "men are all detestable, and they require heaps of things to make them go down at all. There's the old lady, I hear her voice," as steps came along the hall. "Now mind, not a word about the Beaudesert people unless you can't help it."

The door opened, and the Marchioness of Daintree was ushered into the room, followed by her son.

Aristocratic, plain and angular, Lady Daintree came forward with an affable smile, and stretched out the tips of her fingers first to Flossie, than to her father.

Murmuring something about the cold, she sat down on a sofa, and allowed herself to be talked to, whilst Lord Daintree chatted pleasantly about the prospects of hunting, and asked if Miss Springold were going to be present at the next meet.

"Yes, and I mean to follow, if there is anyone to give me a lead. My father won't undertake me; he says I destroy his nerve."

"I quite agree with him" was the frank answer; "I should ride like an old woman if I thought I had a young one behind me."

Flossie bit her lip, for she had meant him to take her hint. "Last year I found there was one who was kind enough not to mind."

"Ah! yes, Verreker," with a sudden twinkle in his eye which discomposed her.

Other guests arrived, so the conversation dropped, but she regarded it as an unfortunate beginning, which damped her confidence in her own attractions.

Before she came downstairs her looking-glass had told her that she was freckle-faced, and it was too bad that, in spite of her charming costume, the first man she had applied to be her special friend during the winter had flatly said no. Evidently Valerie had taken the Marquis from her as well as Verreker, and the grudge she already owed her became as bitter as gall.

Before the end of the evening she determined to pay her out, and she kept her word.

The dinner passed off very well, and the Marquis made himself pleasant. Flossie stifled her indignation, and smiled upon him brightly, because she was afraid that if she snubbed him he would simply turn his back on her, and his conversation to his next-door neighbour on the other side, when the rest of the guests might fancy that the snubbing came from him to her. A marquis was too big a fish to ignore at her own table, but on some future occasion he must be made to suffer.

Nothing can be more fascinating than a set of ladies in a drawing-room, when the men, after the unmentionable English fashion, stay behind. It is as if they had left their tongues and every subject of interest in the dining-room, and were only in a state of semi-existence till the door opens, and the first individual in a white tie acts like an electric battery.

Then brilliant glances gleam from under dark lashes, and red lips are wreathed in smiles, exciting topics bubble up to the surface, and the conversation breaks into new life.

The Marquis of Daintree came up to the sofa where his mother was sitting with her young hostess by her side.

The Marchioness looked up at him with a smile.

"I will surrender Miss Springold to you in five minutes, but red lips are wreathed in smiles,"

"You must have got hold of a tremendous bit of gossip," looking from one to the other with a mischievous glance. "I'll go away now, on condition that I am told every word of it directly afterwards."

"No," said Flossie, gravely; "I am only tell-

ing this to dear Lady Daintree as one of my oldest friends, and I don't wish it to go any further."

"But she can't be an older friend than myself, for I remember how you squealed at your christening."

"An utter fabrication," with a merry laugh, "for I was christened in India."

"Than it was some other ceremony; but you were in long clothes, that I could take my oath to."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the Marchioness, severely. "You never know anything of Miss Springold till you come back from Eton, and I don't suppose you'll pretend that she had long clothes on then."

"Long hair I'm sure she had; and now for this pat piece of gossip."

"Not for the world!" said Flossie, firmly.

"After all, Miss Springold, I think it might be better to tell him. Daintree will not breathe a word of it to anyone else."

"I couldn't," with feigned reluctance. "He would think me unkind, and Valerie is my dearest friend."

"What about her?" said the Marquis, sternly.

"Well, my dear boy, in spite of Miss Springold's scruples, which really do her honour, I think it right to tell you that Valerie de Montfort is not the perfect piece of innocence that we all thought her."

"I'd stake my life that she is," he said, shortly.

Flossie's heart sank. She bent forward and touched the Marchioness's arm with her pale blue fan.

"Please stop. He will only misjudge me."

"There is no question of that," with a slight frown, for Lady Daintree was one of those impudent women who will not brook the slightest opposition. "As his mother, I say Daintree ought to know, as he can blame me if he chooses, but no one else."

"Go on," he said, impatiently. "I am waiting to hear on what grounds you have taken away a poor girl's character."

"We don't go so far as that," his mother broke in, hastily, whilst Flossie bit her lip with mortification at his tone. "It is a sad thing for a girl to be without a mother, and it is no wonder if she gets herself into scrapes!"

"A girl like Lady Valerie will keep straight whether her mother be alive or dead," he said, doggedly, still with a resentful look in his eyes.

"But she has not," with a mournful shake of her stately head.

The Marquis drew a deep breath. "It would take more than a piece of drawing-room gossip to make me swallow that."

"What do you say to her nearly eloping with Colonel Darrell on the night of the ball?" with a malicious gleam in her eyes, provoked by her son's obstinacy.

"I say she did not do so—that she never thought of doing so. It is a trumped up lie, which ought not to have been taken in either you or Miss Springold." His face was red, and his voice shook with indignation.

"Perhaps you will change your mind when I tell you that she still keeps up a secret correspondence with him—that this modest piece of innocence steals out in the dusk to keep assignations with a man whom her father has forbidden the house?"

They both looked up into his face and saw it change, as his thoughts flew back to the scene in the ill-lit street, when the girl whom he believed in with all his whole heart and soul stood in the twilight with a man—he looking up to her with her hands clasped in his, she looking down to him with the tears on her cheeks—and that man was Colonel Darrell!

One minute he hesitated, and then raised his head defiantly. "I don't believe a word of it. But if she does meet him" he added, with what to them seemed strange inconsistency, "depend upon it there is a good reason for it, and when we find out the mystery we shall be thankful that we never insulted her with a doubt."

"Humph," uttered the Marchioness, with a queer look at Flossie, "I don't want to doubt the

girl, but I'm afraid I do. As to you," turning to her son almost viciously, "I suppose the next thing is you will be wanting to present her to me as a daughter-in-law?"

"We should be so well suited!" with a harsh laugh which betrayed his pain, at least to one of his hearers. "I am afraid the comic papers would be full of *Beauty and the Beast*."

"Nonsense," said the Marchioness, indignant, "a coronet and your fortune would be better than the face of an Adonis."

He turned away as if not caring to pursue the subject, but soon afterwards found a pretty little figure draped in blue standing at his elbow. "You will remember, won't you," said Flossie, beseechingly, "that I only spoke as Valerie's friend?"

"Then 'save me from my friends' is the proverb I shall quote to Lady Valerie at our next meeting."

"Don't be so unkind," with a pout, "you know I meant no harm."

"I know nothing of the sort," with uncompromising gravity.

"You don't mean to say you are angry with me!" opening her eyes in displeased surprise.

He lowered his voice and spoke through his set teeth, whilst his eyes gleamed with concentrated passion. "If you had been a man, and not in a lady's drawing-room, I'd have knocked you down; perhaps that will show you what I thought of you." Turning away a second time he slipped out of the room and ordered the carriage without consulting his mother, leaving Miss Springold nearly choking with indignation.

Soon afterwards the servants came in with the tea, and Lord Daintree was surprised to recognise in the one who was carrying a large silver tray, Panton, the former butler at Beaudesert Castle.

"So you have got Lord Beaudesert's man?" he remarked, carelessly, to the Colonel as he stirred his sugarless tea.

"Yes, I don't much like engaging a friend's cast-off servant; but Flossie took a fancy to the man, and thought he had been hardly used. You know that poor old Beaudesert has a violent temper," with an indulgent smile.

"So should I if a servant opened my letters. In the Earl's place I'd have kicked him downstairs and refused him a farthing of his wages."

The Colonel looked astounded. "You don't mean to say he did that? My daughter told me he was dismissed for a trifling fault, which Beaudesert would have been sure to have overlooked if he had been in a good temper."

"Miss Springold seems to have taken a violent interest in him."

"She did; I'm sure I can't tell you why," with a shrug of his shoulders. "She never engaged a man-servant before, but always left that part of the business to me. Why are you hurrying away? It's quite absurdly early."

"Thanks, my mother never likes to be late," ignoring the fact that the Marchioness was never in bed till the small hours.

"Good-bye, my dear," said Lady Daintree with an affable smile, as she pressed Flossie's hand. "Come to lunch with us one day next week, and Daintree shall show you his new hunter."

"Mother, that girl's a viper," said the Marquis, as soon as they were on their way homewards, "and a clean pair of heels is the only thing I shall show her if you have her over to Bolton."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FIGHTING AGAINST SCANDAL.

"Did you ever know anything so disgusting as to get a servant from a neighbour's family, and pump him up to all that goes on in the house?" and Lord Daintree threw his cigar away with an expression of contempt on his homely features. "That's what Flossie Springold has done, and then she whispers the infernal gossip all over the country."

"Bad form. What a wicked little flirt is the girl!" said Lord Marshall with a smile, as if thinking of certain passages which had passed between him and the said coquette.

"She's worse than a fiend; I should like to give her a thrashing," viciously.

"My dear fellow—rather strong. I thought you were a friend of hers."

"I could strangle her and feel none the worse for it afterwards; I only know that."

Lord Marshall, who had been lounging at his ease in one of the most comfortable arm-chairs in the Bolton smoking-room, turned and stared at his host. "You are positively dangerous!"

"Not to be wondered at, when you think of the mischief that's brewing. What will you feel like if the cold shoulder's turned on Lady Valerie at the next county ball?"

"Confound their cold shoulder. Let them try it, and between us we can make the county too hot to hold them," springing to his feet with unworded activity.

"Much good that will do," with bitter contempt; "we can't make war on old dowagers and their daughters. Look here, Marshall," very gravely, "she must marry!"

A long pause, during which the Viscount regarded the fire moodily. At last he said roughly, "you know I can't help you there."

"You might; you are a friend of Verreker's, and I can't help fancying that she likes him," with a deep sigh which broke from him against his will.

The other nodded. "I know she does."

A longer pause whilst the Marquis was digesting the bitterest pill he had ever swallowed. "Then—then—I suppose we must wait till next year—and that will be too late," he added, despondingly.

"We must not be too late—the Earl wouldn't hear of the match. You've a better chance—go in and win," said Lord Marshall, hoarsely, without looking at his friend.

No answer, as Daintree's thoughts travelled back to the President's ball. He had avowed his love, and received no encouragement, and only a quarter of an hour later heard another man declare that Valerie de Montfort would be his wife—the same man with whom she had had a stolen interview that very afternoon. Which was the true rival—that man or Verreker? Verreker who was out of the way, with nothing to offer, and no one to plead his cause!

"Your name would shield her from the women's scandal," urged Lord Marshall, generously. "No one would have a word to say against the Marchioness of Daintree—not even Fosse."

"Hang it all! I'll go and make a fool of myself if you wish it," said the Marquis, irritably; "but I shall do no good, and only wish myself at the bottom of the sea."

"You will do no harm, and that's something," said his friend, soothingly.

The Marquis rode off in the gathering twilight, and the gloom of the evening seemed to coincide with that of his thoughts.

His manly nature had been roused to the uttermost by a scandalous paragraph which had appeared in one of the society papers. No names were given, but the allusion was evident, and Lady Valerie De Montfort was cautioned under the mask of a certain number of asterisks, which corresponded exactly with the letters of her name, that rank could not throw a veil of respectability over assignations kept in the twilight, and compromising letters should be destroyed and not allowed to drop on the floor, where they were apt to take root and flourish like the mustard-tree.

It was the talk of the county, and public opinion had already set itself against the unfortunate girl who had compromised herself with such apparent effrontery.

Lord Daintree, as a man of the world, knew that nothing but a most respectable marriage could save her reputation; but he was not at all sure whether she in her innocence would not think the remedy worse than the disease.

With an air of hesitation very foreign to his nature he walked into her boudoir, and after a hurried "How are you!" sat down in a chair, which she pointed out to him on the other side of the fireplace.

Finding that he did not speak, she began by remarking how good it was of him to ride over on such a dull afternoon. Unfortunately the Earl had gone into the town, and Miss Beck was laid up with headache.

"God of it," he said, abruptly.

"How very unfeeling of you! What harm has the poor thing ever done you?" taking up a screen to shield her face from the fire.

"None. I'm desperately fond of her," trying to summon his courage, but quite overcome by her beauty as she sat opposite to him.

"I hope the Marchioness is quite well?" wondering what made him so unusually silent.

"I don't know—I mean quite well. Lady Valerie, it is no use beating about the bush," getting up from his seat in strong agitation. "I told you in Paris that I loved you, and I want to say it again."

"But why—why?" putting up her hands as if to shield herself from his glowing eyes.

"Because you must marry somebody, and—and why shouldn't it be me? I know I could make you happy, and I'd try so hard to make all smooth."

"You are very good," the tears in her eyes as she heard the deep feeling in his voice.

"No, not good at all. I should be the proudest man in England if you would only say 'Yes.'"

"Think of it, dear," and he came and sat down on a low seat close beside her. "Bolton would be nice and near to your father, and it wouldn't be a bad home in itself. I know I'm nothing much—not a genius or anything of that kind, but you should have your own way in everything, and I think we might pull together pretty well."

He tried to take her hand, but she caught it away from him, though infinitely touched by his appeal. He, the Marquis of Daintree, with a rent-roll of eighty thousand a year, talked with more humility than half the younger sons who had nothing but their wits to live on. There was something so noble and simple in his devotion that she felt as if she could scarcely bring herself to refuse it. A tightness came in her throat, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, I wish—I wish you hadn't asked me!" she murmured, brokenly.

"Is it 'No'?" he said, hoarsely.

"Oh, Lord Daintree, I like you so very, very much!" turning to him with appealing eyes, "but—but—" and she stopped with a sob, unable to say the words which hovered on her lips.

"But you like someone else better," in a low, gruff voice. "I knew it—don't make yourself unhappy. I'll bear it somehow."

His broad, sunburnt hand was resting on his knee. She put her small white one timidly upon it.

"Let us be friends still!"

He started at her touch, and his voice shook. "Aye, we'll be friends, of course, dear."

There was a long pause. He had forgotten all the arguments that had driven him there against his will. Feeling stupid and wretched he sat staring into the fire, wishing himself back at Bolton, but unable to go whilst there was a chance of holding that soft little hand in his.

Suddenly he roused himself with a spark of his old resolution. "Tell me, which is it—Darrell or Verreker?"

It was her turn to start. She snatched her hand from his grasp and turned deathly pale. "You have no right to ask!"

"But I have a reason, which, believe me, is urgent. It's not Darrell!"

She shook her head, forgetting what she implied by the one negative, if she did not follow it up by another.

A long silence, broken by Lord Daintree, who felt obliged to go on, although he knew that he was treading on most dangerous ground. "What is Verreker waiting for?"

"I don't understand," raising her head quickly. "He—he is engaged to Miss Springold."

"Impossible! Who told you so?"

"Miss Springold herself," in a low voice muffled by pain.

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.

EPPS'S GRATEFUL—COMFORTING. COCOA BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

TOWLE'S PENNYROYAL & STEEL PILLS FOR FEMALES.

QUICKLY CORRECT ALL IRREGULARITIES, REMOVE ALL OBSTRUCTIONS, and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex. Boxes 1½ & 2½ (containing three times the quantity), of all Chemists. Send anywhere on receipt of 15 or 34 stamps, by E. T. TOWLE & CO., Manufacturers, Dryden Sts., Nottingham.

Beware of Imitations, Injuries and Scams.

ROYAL AJAX CYCLES



ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS
ENORMOUS stock. New and
secondhand, FROM 10s.
MONTHLY. Carriage paid.
Free wheels and rim brakes.
Illustrated Price
Lists Post Free TO
ANY ADDRESS.—THE BRITISH CYCLE MANU-
FACTURING CO., 45, EVERTON ROAD, LIVERPOOL.
(Established 1887.)

KEARSLEY'S 100 YEARS REPUTATION WIDOW WELCH'S FEMALE PILLS.

Awarded Certificate of Merit for the cure of Irregularities, Amenorrhoea, and all Female Complaints. They have the approval of the Medical Profession. Beware of Imitations. The only genuine and original are in White Paper Wrappers. Boxes, 1½d. and 2½d., of all Chemists. 2½d. box contains three times the pills. Dr. Byatt's 14 Years' Experience. By mail, money order, or C. K. KARASER, 17, North Street, Westminster. Sold in the Colonies.

In Burmese schools making the lads shoot is the approved method of elementary instruction. The Burmese educationists argue that so long as a boy is shooting his mind is occupied. When he is silent he is certain to be scheming mischief. Therefore the best shooters are the best pupils.

The cheapest postal service in the world is that of Japan, where, for two sen—about seven-tenths of a penny—letters are conveyed all over the empire. This is the more remarkable when one considers the difficulty of transit over the mountainous and irregular country, where the railway is still in its infancy.

CORK, as everyone knows, is one of the best non-conductors of heat or sound. That it has not been more widely used in building is due chiefly to the difficulty of obtaining it in an unadulterated form. A product called cork tiling has recently been placed upon the market which is made of what is known to the trade as "virgin cork," ground, compressed, and otherwise treated by a patented process, and which is free from the cement and glue usually employed to hold the particles together. We are informed that this is made of this pure, compressed cork form an admirable flooring, which, besides being noiseless, waterproof, warm, and germ-proof, is capable of withstanding hard usage. By varying the degree of compression and modifying the manufacturing process slightly, sheets of cork different in colour and density are obtained, which, when sawed and finished in the form of panels, can be used for wallcovering alone, or in connection with cork-tile floors. Cork compressed into sheets and sawed to the size and thickness desired constitutes a very efficient pulley covering. It is said that a pulley covered or lagged with compressed cork will transmit from fifty to sixty per cent. more power with the same tension of belt than one having only a smooth iron surface.

"Then it's a lie, I could stake my life. Lady Valerie, he is no more engaged to her than I am. I was there when he said good-bye, and I could see he didn't care a straw."

Her heart beat fast with sudden hope, and she shook from head to foot. Was it possible that she had been deceived? She remembered his words about his own marriage—they were not those of a happy lover. She remembered the look which shot from his eyes when the Marquis himself had interrupted them.

Whilst she was lost in thought Lord Daintree sighed, picked up his hat, and got up from his chair. It became evident to him that the sooner he was out of the house the better. But his mission had failed; the county ball still loomed in the distance, and Lady Valerie would go to it unshielded by an engagement to the Marquis of Daintree.

He hesitated; then, standing before her, hat in hand, and flushing crimson, he said, suddenly:

"Will you do me a favour?"

"Certainly, if I can," looking up at him in surprise.

"Will you stay away from the ball on the twenty-third?"

"Stay away! But why? You haven't suddenly begun to think dancing wrong?"

"No, I have a reason. Can't you trust me?"

"It seems so strange—papa was going to fill the house."

"Say you don't wish it. Go away if you possibly can."

"But we've only just come back."

"That doesn't matter," very earnestly. "Lady Valerie, promise, just for my sake, because I'm down on my luck!" grasping her hand tightly.

"Very well," carried away by his earnestness. "I had enough dancing in Paris to last for a lifetime."

"Thank you," he said, gravely, and took his leave, walking slowly out of the room where he had left his happiness behind him.

"Well?" inquired Lord Marshall, as, muddy and depressed, Lord Daintree put his head in at the smoking-room door.

A dolorous shake of the head, and then he added: "But I've managed the other thing—she won't go to the ball."

"That won't do any good. They will say she's afraid."

"You infernal grumbler, there's no satisfying you," and he went out, slamming the door behind him.

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

"You never saw my hands as dirty as yours," said a mother to her little girl. "No, but grandmother did," was the reply.

"How will you have your hair cut?" queried the talkative barber. "Off!" snapped the cabbed patron. And the barber cut on.

PROSPECTIVE TENANT OF FLAT: "Why, there isn't room to swing a cat in here." Janitor: "No; we permit no cats in the building."

THE SHOEMAKER: "This boot doesn't fit. Try a bigger one." She (eversely): "No, sir; bring me the same size a little larger."

JIMMY THE TOUGH: "Yer say yer made money at the races. Did ye pick de winners?" Bill the Sook: "Naw! I picked de winners' pockets."

FLO: "Do you think that Fred would stoop to do a mean thing?" Mary: "I know he would. Only last night he stooped to kiss me, and then changed his mind."

"YOUR honour," protested the burglar, "I am honest as the day is long!" "I don't doubt it," replied the magistrate; "I understand you fellows transact all your business at night."

MOTHER: "What's the matter, Johnnie?" Johnnie: "Sister won's stan' against the wall an' let me frow knives round her. Boo-hoo!"

AUTHOR: "Now, I want your honest opinion. Tell me what faults you see in my book." Friend: "Well, for one thing, I think the covers are too far apart."

MRS. MULLIGAN: "And what did his 'owner say to you this morning?" Mrs. Mulcahy: "Can't you and your husband live together without fighting?" "An' what did you say?" "No, yer 'owner, not happily."

JIGGS: "I tell you what it is, it takes a baby to brighten up a house." Newpop: "That's right. Our first arrived three months ago, and we've been burning gas at all hours of the night ever since."

MISTRESS: "I saw two policemen sitting in the kitchen with you last night, Bridget." Bridget: "Well, ma'am, yez wouldn't have an unmarried lady be sittin' with only one policeman, would ye?" The other wan was a chaperon."

HENRY HINO: "What on earth are you trying to do?" His Heroine: "I was reading about cooking by electricity, so I hung the chops on the electric bell, and I've been pushing the button for half-an-hour, but it doesn't seem to work."

"Hist!" whispered the first accomplice; "there is a price upon your head!" "Heavens!" exclaimed the female villain, paling visibly; "can it be possible that I have forgotten to remove the ticket from that remnant sale hat?"

"I AM not satisfied with the new minister," said the old-fashioned deacon; "his sermons are too short." "I could stand that," said the liberal brother, "if they were not so narrow." "Even that might be overlooked," said the third, a studious one, "but they are hopelessly shallow." Then they voted to make a change.

"WHAT does this mean, Bridget!" exclaimed the lady of the house, returning from shopping; "the telephone's been taken out!" "Sure, ma'am, the girl over the way came over and said her master would like to use it for a little while, and I sent it over to her; but I had a terrible job gettin' it unscrewed from the wall, ma'am."

"I AM ninety-eight years old!" he insisted. Of course we laughed him to scorn. "How," we retorted, "if you are as old as you say, does it happen that you cannot read fine print without the aid of spectacles?" Whereupon the fellow, perceiving that his imposture was discovered, broke down, and confessed that he was only eighty-three.

"I'M sorry about this war in South Africa," said Willie Washington. "It doesn't affect you personally." "Yes it does. Half-a-dozen girls have told me it was going to make diamonds more expensive. Maybe it was my egotistic imagination, but every one of them seemed to have a 'now-is-the-time-to-buy-engagement-rings' look in her eyes."

MAID (breathlessly): "Oh, miss, both the gents you're engaged to has called, and they're in the parlor, and somehow or other they've found it out, and, oh, miss, I'm afraid there'll be trouble." Miss Flirtle: "Horror! Oh, dear! What shall I do?" Maid (after reflection): "I'll fix it. I'll run an' tell 'em you're cryin' y'r eyes out 'cause y'r father has lost all his money."

"ONE AND ALL GARDENING" FOR 1900.

IT is safe to predict for this useful annual, which grows more interesting and attractive every year, a wide circulation. Published at the price of twopenny, which places it within the reach of all, the one aim of its editor, Mr. Owen Greening, is to stir within us a desire to turn even the smallest and poorest patch of ground to good use, and to create a longing for the cultivation of flowers. In this he succeeds admirably, being fortunate in his contributors, who, without exception, write so that they are readily understood by a public not familiar with the technical terms used in horticulture. Mr. R. Dean gives the history and cultural directions for growing chrysanthemums, while Mr. T. W. Sanders tells how a greenhouse may be made a profitable concern and every corner turned to account. There is an article on Bees and Bee-

keeping, with a list of plants suited to their requirements, and another on "Water Gardens." The editor has also secured "testimonials" from a number of well-known people on gardens and gardening.

This is what Miss Winifred Emery (Mrs. Cyril Maude) says:—

"A garden which is entirely in the hands of gardeners interests me very little. I can admire it, of course, but I never wish it belonged to me. My ambition is to dig the ground and sow and plant everything myself, and any better occupation for people who live lives like mine, I am sure is not to be found."

The Commander-in-Chief (Lord Wolseley) writes:—

"The cultivation of flowers is an art that appeals to all sorts and conditions of men and women. The love of nature and of the beautiful with which it never fails to inspire us, softens the hardest of hearts, brings consolation to the wounded in spirit, and a healthy contentment to old and young. I can therefore recommend *One and All Gardening*"

The Countess of Warwick, in the course of a lengthy letter, dwells on the many advantages of gardening, and says:—

"Nowhere can you command such large profit with quick and sure returns as in gardening. 'Cast your bread upon the waters' in the majority of schemes wherein we have to betake ourselves in this inventive age, and how uncertain is the return, how undefined the duration of our watching and waiting. In gardening the venture is made, the period of waiting is defined, and supposing reasonable care to have been exercised, the return is sure. In the most cold-blooded phraseology of an intensely utilitarian age, gardening is a good investment. In those emphatic monosyllables I repeat: 'It pays.' . . . In all seriousness, I believe we should all be happier and healthier—aye, and some of us wealthier too—if we went back, ever and anon, to Nature in this way. The brief snatches of existence passed in the garden, if brief they needs must be, would prove for the jaded workers at other pursuits like draughts of a purer air; and the output of exertion required for this work, instead of deadening the energies for other avocations, would quicken our powers for them, and add a new zest to our enjoyment of their results."

The Late Florence Marryat writes:—

"A love of flowers indicates a refined and elevated mind. One seldom, if ever, meets a coarse and brutal gardener. We look from Nature up to Nature's God."

Sir Walter Besant, M.A., in a passage reprinted from *The City of Refuge*, says:—

"Of all human occupations, gardening is by far the most interesting. The gardener not only cultivates the soil, making it produce delicious peaches, strawberries, plums and pears, apples and quinces, radishes and cabbages, roses and lilies, corn and barley, but he also cultivates many most useful human faculties, such as patience, self-sacrifice, observation, perseverance, memory, forethought, and many other things. It is not without meaning that Adam is said to have been a gardener. For my own part I have never been able to understand why kings and the great ones of the earth, who have often become watchmakers, carpenters, cabinet-makers, chemists, poets, and painters, have never become gardeners. They always have a garden of their own, yes, a back garden and a front garden; they have every opportunity of self-improvement by means of the garden; yet so far as we have got in history, the kings and the great ones of the earth have neglected that opportunity."

We strongly advise every one of our readers, even if they have no garden of their own, to buy and read *One and All Gardening* for 1900.

SOCIETY.

An avenue of lime trees is being planted on Smith's Lawn, Windsor Park, as a memorial of the Queen's eightieth birthday. Prince Albert of Schleswig-Holstein planted the first tree.

The Duchess of Albany and the young Duke and Princess Alice are at Stuttgart, where they will continue to reside for some months. They will be the guests of the Queen again during this year.

The Queen hopes while abroad to receive visits from near relatives, including some of her married grand-children. It is, however, unlikely that there will be anything approaching to the entertaining of foreign Royal personages as at Cimiez, which was very tiring to the Queen.

The Princess of Wales is a great collector of lace, this hobby having originated in the wedding present she received from the King of the Belgians, which consisted of some £10,000 worth of lace. The Princess's collection is now of the value of £50,000. Her Royal Highness has the most beautiful set of furs extant, which she wears occasionally at State ceremonies. This was the silver wedding gift from the Tsar of Russia. Lace-collecting is almost a mania among wealthy American ladies, huge fortunes being spent in its acquisition.

The Grand Duchess Hélène Vladimirovna of Russia is, with the Grand Duchess Olga, her cousin and sister of the Tsar, the only marriageable Princess in the great Romanoff family at present. Her mother, née Princess Marie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, was born May 14th, 1854, and married, at St. Petersburg, August 28th, 1874, the Grand Duke Viadimir, born April 22nd, 1847, uncle of the Tsar. There are besides three sons, all unmarried, viz., the Grand Duke Cyril, Boris, and Andrew—twenty-four, twenty-three, and twenty-one years of age respectively. Their aunt is the Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and their uncle the Grand Duke Serge, the husband of Princess Elizabeth of Hesse, grand-daughter of the Queen.

ARRANGEMENTS are now complete for the Queen's visit to Bordighera, and she will probably leave Windsor, whither she is going, on March 10th. It is fortunate in many respects that Her Majesty has been able to again seek an entire change this year; for she has passed through a time of deep depression, and in view of the havoc that influenza has wrought, it is eminently desirable that the venerable Sovereign should be taken from its predisposing influences. At Bordighera she will have the companionship of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse; while it is not impossible that the Princess of Wales, Princess Victoria of Wales, and Princess Charles of Denmark may also visit her there, as they will be near at hand.

THE White Lodge in Richmond Park was "lent" by Her Majesty to the late Duke and Duchess of Teck, who asked for it when they returned to England in 1885 after a long residence on the Continent. They had previously surrendered their apartments in Kensington Palace, which were granted to them by the Queen after the death of the Duchess of Inverness, the widow of the Duke of Sussex, and this residence has recently been granted to Princess Beatrice by Her Majesty. The White Lodge was granted by George the Fourth to Lord Sidmouth (who had been successively Speaker, Prime Minister, and Home Secretary), and when he died in 1844 the place was given by the Queen to her aunt, the Duchess of Gloucester, after whose death Her Majesty kept it in her own hands, intending that it should be occupied by the Prince of Wales, and she bought the whole of the contents of the house from the executors of the Duchess. The Prince of Wales did not like the place, and it was not again occupied by any member of the Royal Family until it became the residence of the Duke and Duchess of Teck. The contents of the house belong to the Queen, except the personal property of the late Duke of Teck.

STATISTICS.

EIGHT soldiers are located in Ireland to one in Scotland.

EVERY ninth person in France is a trained soldier.

A BRITISH soldier of the line costs the country £55 a year.

NINE TENTHS of all submarine cables, so important in war-time, are owned or controlled by British capital.

The German Army numbers 585,000 in times of peace. War would bring it to 2,230,000 and the reserves added make the number of men 4,300,000.

GEMS.

COURAGE without conscience is little better than cowardice.

To him nothing is possible who is always dreaming of his past possibilities.

YOUNG folks tell what they do, old ones what they have done, and fools what they intend to do.

MEN are like shadows; follow them and they will continue to go before you; turn and flee, and they will follow you.

If you want knowledge, you must toll for it; if food, you must toll for it; and if pleasure, you must toll for it; toll is the law.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HOUSEHOLD SCONES.—One pound flour, three-quarters teaspoon soda, three-quarters teaspoon tartaric acid, a little sugar, some sweet milk; rub the lumps out of the soda and tartaric, and mix the whole with the milk, and roll out your scones; you can't make scones without carbonate of soda, for they would not rise or be nice unless it be thin scones; but if you use the tartaric acid the scones won't be brown; it is the want of an acid that makes the soda taste and brown them.

CARAMEL AU CAFÉ.—Put into a tin mould the juice of one lemon, add two tablespoonsfuls of castor sugar. Then place it on the stove and let it boil slowly until it becomes a dark brown colour. Spread this evenly round the mould, put the mould into a cool place, and let it become thoroughly cold; break four eggs into a bowl, beat well for two minutes, add half a pint of milk and a teaspoonful of strong coffee, sugar to taste. Strain and fill the mould with this cream. Place it in a pan filled with water to half the height of the mould, and place it in a very moderate oven for forty minutes. When of a good golden colour remove and cool for at least two hours. Turn out and serve with whipped cream, flavoured with vanilla essence.

EXTER STEW.—Ingredients: Two pounds of beefsteak, one large carrot and turnip, two onions, one ounce butter or beef dripping, a bunch of herbs, salt and pepper, half-gill vinegar, half-gill water or stock, two tablespoonsful flour. Cut the meat into neat pieces about two inches square. Prepare the vegetables, and cut them into neat rings or dice. Melt the butter in a pan, add the vegetables, and stir them about in the hot fat for ten minutes. Then add the meat, herbs (tied together), one small teaspoonful of salt, a dust of pepper, and the vinegar and stock. Cover tightly, and simmer very gently for at least three hours. Serve with a ring of the vegetables round the dish, the meat in the centre, and the gravy poured round after it has first been thickened by mixing the flour smoothly with a little water, adding it to the gravy, and then allowing it to well boil.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE cotton crop in Peru grows in twelve different colours.

SPAIN was the first nation to equip foot-soldiers with muskets.

ZOOLOGISTS say that all known species of wild animals are gradually diminishing in size.

THE fastest-flowing river in the world is the Satlej, in India. Its descent is 12,000 feet in 130 miles.

AN eminent naturalist says that land birds make their journeys in the daytime, and water birds at night.

THE most ancient coin in Europe—the ducat was first struck in the mint of Venice in the year 1284. The building is still in existence.

AN Italian has invented a boat with steel fins, which is propelled solely by the motion of the sea-water. It goes best in rough weather.

IN Germany, and also in Holland, girls are chosen in preference to young men in all employments in which they can be advantageously employed.

THE power of scent possessed by a deer is wonderfully acute. These animals have been known to take flight at the scent of a man twenty-four hours after he has passed the spot.

BULLETS of stone were used in 1514, leaden bullets coming into use shortly before the end of the sixteenth century. Iron bullets have been mentioned as in use in 1550.

A RUSSIAN bride is not submitted to the trying ordeal of appearing in white satin and lace in cold, broad daylight. The wedding takes place by candle-light in the drawing-room.

DIVANS in the British Navy, before being passed as proficient in their craft, have to be able to work in twelve fathoms of water for an hour, and twenty fathoms for a quarter of an hour.

PROBABLY the first caricature in manuscript is to be found in an Egyptian papyrus in the British Museum, where the lion and unicorn are represented playing a game like draughts.

THE truth of the adage about constant dripping wearing away a stone is strikingly illustrated in the fact that the Niagara River has in 36,000 years cut a channel 200ft. deep, 2,000ft. wide, and 7 miles long, through solid rock.

THE whistling-tree, which is found in the West Indies, in Nubia, and the Soudan, has a peculiar-shaped leaf, and pods with a split edge. The wind passing through these produces the sound which gives the tree its name.

OPAL MINING is one of the latest Australian mineral industries. The principal opal-mining centre is White Cliff, where the gem has been found in highly valuable quantities, and of the richest quality, within a radius of ten miles, and a population of 1,500, or thereabouts, is settled there.

A PETRIFIED forest, covering an area of 100 square miles, has existed for centuries near Billings, in Arizona. Thousands and thousands of petrified logs strew the ground, and represent beautiful shades of pink, purple, red, grey, blue and yellow. One of the stone trees spans a gulf forty feet wide.

UTOPIA is now known to be located at Orsa, in Sweden. The community has, in course of a generation, sold £100,000 worth of trees, and by means of judicious replanting has provided for a similar income every thirty or forty years. In consequence of this commercial wealth there are no taxes. Railways, telephones, &c., are free, and so are schoolhouses, teaching, and many other things.

ENGLISH bees were introduced into Trinidad many years ago, but they have lost most of their thrifty ways, and become demoralized by the flower wealth all the year round. They also decline to be confined in hives, which most likely they find too hot, and so they build wherever they like. An enormous colony had settled years and years before, evidently, under the flooring of one of the cool north verandas of Government House.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANXIOUS.—Quite legal.

POSS.—There is no real difference.

N. C.—It would be oil of bergamot.

BEAR.—Any metallurgist would tell you.

ALLAHABAD.—Allahabad is in Province of Calcutta.

A. E. C.—The father's death does not liquidate the debt.

MARBLE.—With turpentine: dip flannel cloth in that, and rub.

POLITICS.—The two last general elections were in 1852 and 1855.

WINKLES.—Massage, properly done, it is said, will remove wrinkles.

PRO-BORN.—The battle of Majuba Hill took place on February 26-27, 1881.

QUARANTINE.—If you saw it in an advertisement, you must write to advertiser.

G. M. P.—Sir G. Warren was Chief Commissioner of Metropolitan Police 1856-58.

DUM-DUM.—The British have never used the dum-dum bullet against civilised opponents.

BEAUTY.—Soak a little fine oatmeal in cold water, and apply each night before going to bed.

FIREFLY.—We cannot answer medical questions in this column. By all means consult a physician.

BIRDIE.—Most cage bird dealers, we should think, keep it. If not, any seed dealer could supply it.

UNDECIDED.—First find out what you think you would find congenial, and then endeavour to get a situation.

MILK.—Wash them in hot water, rinse with cold and dry thoroughly, and your end will then be attained.

ANXIOUS OME.—The British loss in the Crimea was 20,000, but more died in hospital than on the battlefield.

A. E. O.—Prince Henry died of fever when accompanying an expedition to punish the King of Oummashie in 1856.

J. S.—Parcels will be forwarded to men on warships if addressed to the squadron to which the ship is attached.

H. D.—You cannot lay down any hard and fast rule for success, as so much depends upon opportunity as well as capacity.

PART.—A gunner must find his right range by constant experiments, as the course of a shell is affected by atmospheric conditions.

Y. Y.—Your best course, if you wish your wife to have the benefit of your property after your death, is to make a will to that effect.

BROKEN-HEARTED.—When an engagement has been broken off, the overture for a renewal of it must first proceed from the gentleman.

R. D.—If her husband is dead all personal property would be equally divided. Real property would go to eldest son, or, if dead, his eldest son.

TOM'S DARLING.—Our Parliament could at any time call up every healthy male between twenty-one and forty years of age for military service.

IN GREAT TROUBLE.—If you can't get your case taken up, in forma pauperis, it will cost you nothing. Inquire at Divorce Registry, Somerset House.

S. O. A.—Oil of almonds is one of the poisons specially scheduled in the Act which can be sold only by duly registered chemists; it is a very deadly article.

DAINTY.—You cannot resilver the spots; the whole should be removed, chemically cleaned, and then resilvered. It would cost you more than to buy one.

FAIRMAID.—The most unhappy of all men is the man who cannot tell what he is going to do, who has got no work cut out for him in the world, and does not go into it.

BUNNIE BEL.—Having no children, wife, or parents, the deceased leaves his money to his father's brothers and sisters equally, or if they are all dead to their children equally.

W. R.—The personal property goes one-third to the widow and two-thirds to the children equally. The real property goes to the son, with one-third to the widow for her life.

Q. D.—Use it exactly as you would soap. Put a little in the palm of one hand, damp it, and rub the face thoroughly, afterwards washing off with soft water and drying thoroughly.

BAUBLES.—Your hedgehog will feed freely on any insects it finds about the house, such as cockroaches, and may have little scraps of meat or bread; it is not a particularly dainty feeder.

LONGBEST READER.—"Perpetual motion" means a power which supplies its own motive for repeating itself. Much time and money have been wasted in the endeavour to discover it without success.

DESPAIR.—The man's bigamy does not alter his legal relationship in the slightest to his true wife; he must either resign her on coming out of prison or make sufficient allowance for her maintenance elsewhere, perhaps to the extent of one-third of his earnings.

SCORPIO.—We do not think that a fixed idea of the state of mind or feeling in those who are drowning will ever be reached and authoritatively described, because the sensation differs in different people.

MADAME.—Use equal parts of salad oil and vinegar to keep your linoleum floor covering bright. Rub the mixture in thoroughly with a flannel cloth, using only a small quantity at a time, and allowing nothing of it to remain on the surface of the linoleum.

LILAC SUMMER.—Make a paste with soap and whitening mixed in equal quantities and softened with hot water. Rub this on a piece of flannel till all stains are removed, let dry, and polish with a chamois leather and dry whitening.

IN NEED OF HELP.—As to what kind of a ring should be given as an engagement ring, that is optional with the giver. As a rule, it is a diamond. It is worn on the third finger of the left hand. It would be courteous to consult the young lady as to her wishes.

A HARD LIFE.—You could not marry again until you knew of your husband's death, although absence for seven years—never having heard of one another during that time—would be a good defence on a charge of bigamy.

TAIAL.—It is difficult to get a boy into the Bluecoat School. The mode is by presentation by subscribers in rotation. A gentleman subscribing £500 to the funds of the hospital would have the right of nominating a boy once in three years.

BUZY BEES.—You might try by rubbing with finely powdered starch, which must be quite dry, and a very little laundry blue added to it. If the silk has a creamy tinge, breadcrumbs and finely powdered chalk is the best thing to rub in.

DOR.—To restore the colour of ivory which has become yellow, boil it for an hour in a solution of alum. Another plan is to clean it with burnt pumice-stone powdered and moistened with a little water. Dry in the sun under glass.

YOU.

If I could have my dearest wish fulfilled,
And take my choice of all earth's treasures, too,
Or choose from heaven whatsoe'er I willed,
I'd ask for you.No man I'd envy, neither low nor high,
Nor king in castle old or palace new;
I'd hold Golconde's mines less rich than I,
If I had you.Toil and privation, poverty and care,
Undaunted I'd defy, nor fortune woe:
Having my wife, no jewel else I'd wear,
If she were you.Little I'd care how lovely she might be,
How graced with every charm, how fond, how
true;
Men though perfection, she'd be naught to me
Were she not you.There is more charm for my true loving heart,
In everything you think or say or do,
Than all the joys that heaven could e'er impart,
Because it's you.

CHRIS.—The disfigurement is caused by obstructed perspiration. The ducts of your skin are large, and the interrupted discharge lodged there turns black from exposure to the atmosphere. Squeeze the parts affected, and then bathe them with weak diluted spirits of wine.

ALICE.—When the gilt frames of pictures or looking-glasses or the gilt mouldings of rooms have got specks of dirt upon them, from flies or other causes, they can be cleaned with the white of an egg gently rubbed on with a camel's hair pencil.

MUCH-RAINED.—Rub them after washing with a little vinegar or lemon-juice, and while still wet rub a little glycerine well in. Afterwards dry thoroughly, and dust with powdered oatmeal. If you have to do any washing up always rub a little vinegar or lemon-juice well in afterwards.

WIDOW X.—There would be nothing whatever inappropriate in giving a widow an engagement ring when she promises to marry the man who offers it; the thing has no legal significance, but must be regarded rather as an acknowledgement of the man's gratitude to the woman for her favour.

PHYL.—A lure which is largely used by rat-catchers is oil of aniseed, which may be painted upon any food laid down for the vermin; rats are so acute, however, that it will not do to lay the stuff on with the finger, because they could detect the human agency through the smell which the fingers would leave.

LIZA.—We know of nothing that would get them out but taking the upholstery of the chair to pieces; remove the stuffing, boil it well and when dry put it back, having sprinkled it with a mixture of pounded camphor and ground pepper. The boiling is to kill the eggs and worms.

ELIZA.—The purity of linen may be known by carefully examining the threads under a strong magnifying glass. Those of flax are in the form of cylindrical sticks, divided at intervals by knots, similar to those seen in a bamboo stem. Cotton ones are long, flattened like ribbon, waved, twisted in spirals, and granulated on the surface.

SAUCY KATE.—One pint of linseed oil, one ounce of alkanet root, one ounce of rose pink. Put the ingredients into an earthenware vessel, and let stand till night. Next day stir well, and rub off with a woollen cloth. When dry, rub it off, and apply any polish or varnish preferred.

JANE B.—First brush off all dust. Then dissolve a piece of gum arabic about the size of a very small nut in three tablespoonfuls of cold water. The best plan is to put this soaking overnight. Brush the hat well over with this solution being careful that the brush penetrates to every part. Hang in a cool place till dry.

AWKWARD AMY.—No remedy except training yourself into a better habit; manners, like speech, are matter of imitation, and if you take as much trouble to note how self-possessed, well-breath'd people conduct themselves on meeting, as you have done to copy correct speech, you should not now have been blushing and stammering.

HOME LAUNDERESS.—It is often sufficient to wet it with soapuds and lay it in the hot sun. Another method is, where milk is plentiful, to put one pound of white soap into a gallon of milk, and boil the scorched article in it. Another plan is to squeeze out the juice of two middle-sized onions, which is boiled in half a pint of vinegar, with one ounce of white soap and two ounces of fuller's earth. The mixture is applied cool to the scorched part, and when dry is washed off with clean water.

HELIER S.—Dissolve a piece of soda the size of a walnut in a quart of hot water in which you can comfortably bear your hand, or, if you prefer it, you can use a tablespoonful of ammonia instead of the soda. Free the brush from all hairs, and dip it, bristles downwards, in and out of the water till it looks clean; rinse by dipping in and out of cold water in the same way. Shake as dry as you can; wipe the bristles and handle carefully, and dry at once either in the open air or before a fire, the former if possible.

CITIZENS.—A policeman can, in case of need, call upon any citizen to assist him in capturing or retaining a prisoner, and should the desired help be refused, the citizen is liable to a heavy fine; of course, self-preservation is first law with all persons, citizens or not, and no one is by statute forced to venture his life in defence of another except the soldier, and he only at the command of his officer; the civilian, may, therefore, safely disregard the constable's call if he is satisfied that he could respond to it only at serious risk to himself without benefiting the constable.

NOVICE.—Fill the bowl with oil every morning, if it has been used the night before, and clean the fines until they are bright and shining. Trim the wick daily, cutting the charred portion off with sharp scissors even with the top of the tube. The burners are apt to become gummy and clogged, and cannot give a good light while in that condition. Put them in a strong pearling suds once a week, and boil them ten or fifteen minutes. Polish with dry flannel, and it will be like a new burner. Keep the wick turned low when not lighted to prevent the oil from oozing out over the top.

FARZ.—He is not the Emperor of Germany, because that would mean he reigned over the whole country as king, while, as master of fact, he is merely "King of Prussia," as his full title shows, and reigns supreme over all affairs in that country alone; other divisions of the Empire have each their king, prince or hereditary ruler; but he is German Emperor, with power to command the energies of the entire empire in certain cases, such as declaring war for the defence of Germany, making peace, receiving ambassadors, representing other countries, and under certain restrictions making treaties; in short, doing in name of the whole empire just the things that could not be done effectively by the collective rulers.

NOT TALL ENOUGH.—You may by regular habits, and doing all that common-sense suggests to maintain good health, give your growth a chance, but it is impossible to raise yourself higher than nature intended; by acquiring a good carriage, which is what the army drill counters, you may look actually taller than you stand; practise daily with the horizontal bar, or falling that, grasp the ledge of a window over door in your lobby and raise the body slowly a dozen times in succession with the hands until the chin rests on the ledge; another exercise is to put arms rigidly at sides with little fingers touching seams of trousers, head being meanwhile erect and well back; in this position raise yourself perhaps a score of times solidly on toes; repeat this exercise often; swimming is another good straightening exercise.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post-free Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Bookseller.

NOTICE.—Part 466 is Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXXIII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXXIII. is now Ready! Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

** We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

